DANGANRONPA ZERO

VOLUME 1

CHAPTER 1

Junko Enoshima despaired.

Everything turned out just the way she expected…
Everything turned out just the way she hoped… and so she despaired.

…Huh? Is it really that easy?

Magma-like heat boiled up deep inside her stomach, gradually swelled inside her body, and exploded when it reached her chest. The explosion escaped her heart and reached every muscle in her body, bringing her to a complete standstill. The sound of splashing water came from the muddy pool she stood in as droplets of water danced through the air.

On closer examination, one could notice the water was red.

As soon as her body stopped moving, the red droplets of water came raining down, making grotesque patterns on her clothes and skin.

Her clothes, painted deep red with blood.
Her skin, painted deep red with blood.

Her face, painted deep red with blood.

Nevertheless, none of this caught her attention. Instead, she started tapping her foot impatiently. It was a magnificent tap. She put every bit of strength, body, and soul she had into it. Her entire existence. And then, after tapping for a while, Junko Enoshima let out an annoyed yell, as fierce as the roar of a feverish rampaging beast.

"BUT THAT'S NOT ENOUGH!"

Her scream echoed through her surroundings, the noise pouring down as if it was a rock shattering into pieces. But she wasn't done. She continued to scream. "MORE! MORE! I NEED EVEN BETTER DESPAIR-INDUCING DESPAIR!". She continued tapping her foot intently.

Despair-inducing despair. That was what she was after. She wanted not only for the world to despair, but also for despair worthy of her own self.

"MORE MORE MORE! DESPAIR-INDUCING DESPA–"

She stopped mid-thought. Something clicked inside her head, and she stopped moving. Her face froze in a surprised expression, and she stood petrified as if every muscle in her crimson-painted body stopped working.

Then, she let out a weak whisper.

"…Oh, I see."

A series of gears and switches began moving deep inside her skull, sparking pitch black thoughts. A certain object floated up inside her mind. A face. It was a face she knew, of course. The face of a fellow student at Hope's Peak Academy.

"…Upupu."

Her body shivered as she started laughing. The shiver gradually spread to her entire body, and then, she started tapping her foot again.

"Upu… Upupupupupupupupupupupu."

This time her tapping resembled a dance. She tapped her foot like a girl who couldn't help feeling joyous. A girl who couldn't help having fun.

"Oh, it's so wonderful! So wonderful!"

And, as the face of the person destined to bring her so much wonderful despair kept floating inside her mind –

Her heart overflowing with a strange feeling that almost felt like love –

Junko Enoshima danced to the rhythm of despair.

"Oh, it's going to be so magnificent, this despair!"

Laughing ecstatically, Super High-school Level Despair Junko Enoshima continued dancing. She danced as if she was losing her mind.

That was the beginning. The beginning of a story that ends in despair.

CHAPTER 2

Hope's Peak Private Academy. An exclusive, government-sanctioned school accepting only students with exceptional abilities. Its stated goal is to raise the future "hope" of the nation, and for that reason, it became known as "The Academy of Hope". It's a source of envy, as it's common knowledge that one can gain great success in life just by being a Hope's Peak graduate. Certainly, many Hope's Peak graduates are now employed in high positions in every field of the professional world, so that statement is not an exaggeration.

There are two requirements to becoming a Hope's Peak student:

One must be currently enrolled in a high school.

One must super-excel at their field of expertise.

Hope's Peak doesn't hold any standard entrance exams, as the academy insists that the things tested by these kind of exams are meaningless for its purposes. Instead, students are scouted for by the academy's staff, who serve as both educators and researchers of extraordinary human ability. Some say Hope's Peak Academy's faculty members are much like parents, who made it their life's mission to find talent and nurture it in their children.

Right now, every member of that extraordinary faculty, as well as the academy itself, is facing an unprecedented, unparalleled crisis.

Hope's Peak Academy's faculty building is located in the academy's eastern quarter, and is the only building on campus students are forbidden to enter. The corridors of that building, usually busy with staff members going back and forth, were now empty and engulfed in an unnatural silence. The laboratories, the private rooms, and the luxurious personal offices had all been abandoned. Every man and woman who usually occupies these locations were currently gathered in a single place.

Meeting room 13.

Hope's Peak Academy's largest meeting room is located on the top floor of the faculty building, and has a maximum capacity of over 300. Nevertheless, with every single faculty member attending, it was fully packed. Not a single empty seat remained next to the long tables lined across the room.

But, for such a huge crowd, the room was relatively quiet. Only a single person's voice could be heard. The voice of Hope's Peak Academy's headmaster, Jin Kirigiri.

He faced the assembled faculty members from his position at the foremost table, and read from a printout he held in his hand. He spoke in an unaffected tone of voice, a blank expression on his face. The words printed on the paper came out of his mouth as if he was nothing more than an automaton reading them out. As far as Kirigiri was concerned, that was his most important duty. It didn't matter how out of the ordinary the subject on hand was. No, he didn't have any time to waste faced with the current state of confusion and unanswered questions. If they had time, there are much more important things they should have been doing –

A voice suddenly rose from the crowd. "Are you saying we're going to cover it up?"

Kirigiri raised his head, and saw three hundred people staring at him intently, waiting for a response.

It wasn't a piercing stare. It was much more uncomfortable than that. Three hundred people stared at him as if they were one entity, and Kirigiri felt every hair on his body tingling. He turned his head toward the four people sitting to his right, trying to escape the stare. They were stationed at the same frontmost table he was, their faces unusually wrinkled. Their eyes were closed, making those wrinkly faces even wrinklier. From Kirigiri's position, it almost looked like the four faces in front of him was one huge, giant wrinkle.

The four members of Hope's Peak Academy's Steering Committee looked as if they were about to give up.

An unintentional bitter smile appeared on Kirigiri's face. So that's how it's going to be. Oh, well. It's not as if I expected anything else. With those feelings festering inside his heart, Kirigiri turned back towards the crowd's stare. He put the paper aside. He was going to use his own words from now on.

"Let me make it perfectly clear", he emphasized. "We reached this decision after putting a lot of thought into the matter at the Hope's Peak Academy steering meeting that took place earlier today."

He felt the temperature in the room turning tepid. It was probably because every faculty member's body have grown stiff in attention. Kirigiri sipped from the cup in his hand, and continued.

"We understand, of course, how extremely irregular this decision is."

The wrinkly faces that were as much a part of the "we" he talked about as he was did not move an inch. It was as if they knew from the very beginning he was going to take the situation into his own hands.

"Make no mistake. We are not covering this incident up to escape responsibility. If I could end it all here and now by simply taking responsibility, I would do so in a heartbeat. Unfortunately, this particular incident cannot be dealt with that easily. It doesn't even matter if each and every one of us 'takes responsibility'. We're dealing with a problem that exists in an entirely different dimension."

Kirigiri stopped for a moment, and finished his glass of water in a single gulp, trying to remain calm.

"…Don't get me wrong. I don't think we are completely blameless here. If we were, that 'Parade' out there would not be taking place right now."

Kirigiri pointed a finger at the curtained window. Several people turned to look at it, a severe expression on their faces.

"That 'Parade' has been growing larger and larger lately. The people in it think we're all despicable. Their opinion is not completely unfounded."

Kirigiri paused and moved his gaze across the room, looking at each of the faculty member's faces as if what he was about to say was personally directed at them, individually.

"Nevertheless, I refuse to believe Hope's Peak Academy's thesis, that talent itself is humanity's first and foremost hope, is wrong. You must realize that if information about this incident leaves the walls of this school, we are likely to lose it all. As far as I'm concerned, that would be a gigantic loss for the human race. Every one of our successful graduates I've spoken to feels the same way."

At the mention of Hope's Peak graduates, the crowd stirred a little.

"That's the reason I and the members of Hope's Peak Academy's Steering Committee reached our decision… We concluded that this incident shouldn't be made public after all."

He took a peek at the old men, but they remained still. Their blank expressions made it look as if what was going on did not concern them.

"…As I said before, I know more than anyone how irregular this decision is. Nevertheless, we have a duty, both as educators and as scientists. The duty to protect talent. Should human talent become the target of public hostility, it would be a great tragedy. Furthermore, there is one more thing I want you all to remember."

The three hundred faculty members waited in attention for Kirigiri's next words.

"The crimes committed may be terrible, but it doesn't change the fact that that student carries a very special brand of hope we raised all on our own."

The color of the faculty's eyes changed in an instant. They did not stir anymore. Everyone sat in complete silence. No one objected. No one could object. His words were narrow-minded, but they reflected the opinions of everyone in the room. They were all acting both as educators and as scientists, researching human talent. And, just like any other scientist becoming obsessed with their area of research, the staff of Hope's Peak Academy were obsessed with talent. Anyone who did not share that obsession did not belong in Hope's Peak.

That's why they listened to Kirigiri's words, and made their decision.

They had to protect their thesis. They had to protect the future they believed in. They had to protect the hope they believed in.

And so, they would do their best to cover up The Worst Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History.

CHAPTER 3

A yellow cat peeked out from the thicket to the side of the pavement.

It slowly stepped out of the swaying grass and into the road, waving its long tail as it turned its eyes in anticipation towards me. But its expression soon turned to alertness, and then to fear. The cat, having seen me skipping merrily down the road towards it, must have thought I was about to trample it. It escaped back into the bushes in panic.

But, I didn't care at all. I bathed in the light of the hot sun, let the wind flutter my skirt, and continued my obscene merry skip onward down the road. I was in Hope's Peak Academy's eastern quarter, near the courtyard. Many newly-built facilities were lined up around me, as well as several that were still under construction. As I skipped down the road that twisted between them, I took no special notice of any dirty cats or of my classmates, studying and fraternizing all around. Nor did I derive any happiness from the light touch of the sun after a long stay indoors. No, I skipped down the road with nothing but my destination on my mind.

Not that I'm the kind of girl who'd go skipping around thoughtlessly. I had a reason.

I'm going to meet the boy I like the best in the world!

That said, my reason may have been a good one, but no student in their right mind should go skipping down the road in a campus of a school of as high a pedigree as Hope's Peak Academy. Therefore, it wasn't surprising that other students who happened to walk by looked at me oddly, but… that really has nothing to do with me.

Nothing in the world could stop my skipping. Not a crying girl. Not a couple fighting. Not a student in a wheelchair that has come to a standstill. Not even an anemic student who has fallen down. One thought alone moved my body: I want to meet him, I love him so much. I skipped so obscenely that no one would probably find it surprising if I suddenly sprouted wings and flew up towards the sky.

I continued down the road, but…

"…Huh?"

I suddenly came to a stop.

"Which way should I go?"

I looked around in confusion, and realized I didn't recognize any of the landmarks around me. My heart started beating loudly.

No, everything's fine. I calmed myself down and removed a notebook from the backpack I was wearing. On the back page of the notebook, the following sentence was written:

"You're looking for the Neurology lab on the third floor of the Biology building in Hope's Peak Academy's eastern quarter".

I felt a refreshing wind of relief passing through my body. Yeah, that's right! The biology building!

…Um, but where is that biology building, anyway?

My heart went noisy once more.

Everything's fine. No need to worry. I nervously flipped through the notebook as if acting on instinct, and my eyes stopped on a page with a crude drawing of a map. Above it, the following was written:

"This is a diagram of Hope's Peak Academy's eastern quarter"

Well done, me! Without thinking, I struck a victory pose.

Soon, I was standing on the raised edge of the fountain that decorated the center of the courtyard, comparing the buildings around me with the map. Literature building, science building, physics building, arts building, math building, P.E. building, linguistics building, staff building… as cold droplets from the fountain kept hitting my thighs, I looked for my destination, the biology building, as if I've never visited it before.

"Ah, it's right over there!"

I finally found the square building, identifiable by its light-green walls. It looked exactly like the note about the biology building in my notebook described it.

"Right!"

I jumped down from the fountain's edge, and started running. Some boys in the area looked at me in surprise. Maybe my skirt flew up for a second during my vigorous leap – but that really has nothing to do with me.

Anyway, I must reach my destination before I forget!

My ferocious dash led me inside the biology building, where I soon discovered a flight of stairs at the back of the lobby. I didn't lose momentum for even a second as I ran up the stairs to the third floor. When I reached it, I ran down the corridor, checking the signs next to the doors lined on its walls. Finally, at the very end, I found the sign that read "Neurology Lab".

I hastily stopped in my tracks.

After a quick deep breath, I checked my hair and my smile in a hand mirror. Yep, cute as always! Flashing that same wonderful smile and shouting "G'day!" in my brightest voice, I opened the lab's door… and that's when it happened.

Something flew just past my ear, making a wind-cutting wooshing sound.

"…eek!"

I turned my head in panic, and saw a small blade embedded in the wall behind me, still vibrating from the impact. I jumped back. "W…Why is there a scalpel flying through the air?!", I screeched.

"Don't shout", A chiding voice answered back from inside the lab.

The moment I heard that voice, my heart started beating faster. Thump, thump, went my heart as I turned to look inside the lab. A boy was lying on top of a bed installed in the center of the room.

"…You're late. That's unseemly for someone as ugly as you."

A dirty white shirt was sloppily thrown over his body. He was lying face up, his face concentrated on a thick manga magazine he held in his hand. He didn't look at me once.

"You're also too loud for someone as ugly as you. Speaking of, someone as ugly as you being scared of flying scalpels is weird too."

"W…Wait a second!", I stopped him, my voice showing signs of panic. "I could report you for discrimination if you keep calling me ugly, you know!"

"…Who are you going to report me to? The National Japanese Ugly People Association? That kind of organization would be guilty of discrimination just by existing."

The manga-reading boy who kept calling me ugly was the person in charge of this neurology lab. The doctor in charge of my treatment. My childhood friend. The boy I like most in the world.

He's "Super High-school Level Neurologist", Yasuke Matsuda. I think.

"Oh, I see. You're a member of that association, aren't you. Is that why you're so angry?"

"I…I'm not! I'm not even ugly!"

"…On second thought, you're right. You aren't ugly."

My chest swelled in pride and I flashed a complacent smile. "Yep, that's right! I even checked in my mirror just now and –"

"You're super-ugly."

"Super-ugly?!!"

My shock was considerable, but it didn't take me long to recover enough to come up with a sharp response.

"L…Liar! I'm not super-ugly! If anything, I'm world-class cute!"

Matsuda-kun continued to ignore the fuss I was making, his eyes never leaving the magazine.

"I don't care what the world thinks. Ugliness is subjective and I am free to make my own judgment", he said, as if the matter at hand didn't concern him at all.

"So, so, tell me where you think I'm ugly! I'll go fix it up in surgery!", I said in desperation. "Is it my eyes? My nose? Maybe my mouth? How about my eyebrows?"

"You forgot to mention your heart."

"But I can't fix my heart in surgery!"

"Is that so? Poor you. Honestly, you're beyond help - both your face and your brain aren't any good. I think you can have some success if you make yourself an object of sympathy, though. Go stand in front of a train station and beg for change, or something. I'm sure you'll make lots of money."

I dropped my shoulders, crestfallen. Then I let my hands drop towards the floor and my body droop limply. I was beaten up.

"…By the way, who are you?"

"Eh?", I raised my head in surprise at his unexpected question.

"I can't really tell just by the voice."

"Are you saying you didn't know who you were talking to until now?"

"It's your fault. You never told me who you were."

"I…I didn't, but you can recognize me by my look, can't you? See? It's me!"

"I don't have time to look at you", said Matsuda-kun, still absorbed in his book. "I just got to the interesting part."

"Don't have time…? Isn't that just a manga magazine?"

"So what? If you're going to ask, 'What's more important? Me or the manga?', the answer's the same as always. It's the manga."

"I see! If the answer's 'the same as always', that means manga was always more important to you than me! That's cruel! I didn't wanna know that!"

"That's a fine observation, but please just answer the question."

"O…Okay…", Pressured, I took the notebook out of my backpack once more, and observed its front cover.

"Ryouko Otonashi's Memory Notebook". As soon as I saw that title, I remembered. I remembered my own name.

"Um… It seems my name is… Ryouko Otonashi?"

"I know only one person stupid enough to not be sure of her own name."

"…Ah. I think you're talking about me. Probably."

Matsuda-kun let out a big sigh. "Huh. So you weren't someone suspicious after all."

"…Are you trying to say you threw that scalpel earlier because you mistook me for someone suspicious… or something?"

"Exactly. I am not the kind of person who throws sharp objects at acquaintances, after all."

"Liar!", I pointed my index finger straight at Matsuda-kun. "I mean, before you confirmed who I am you told me I was late and that I was too loud for an ugly person! That's proof you knew who I was!"

Smack!

Matsuda-kun loudly snapped his manga magazine shut. He leveraged the bed's cushion to jump up out of it, and walked briskly towards me until there was almost no distance between us.

"Eh? What? Why?"

He looked straight into my eyes. My body grew hotter by the second.

"You… remember that?"

"…Huh?"

Matsuda-kun clutched my shoulders strongly with both his hands. He pushed his face close to mine. "Do you remember me calling you ugly when you got here?", he asked slowly.

Seeing Matsuda-kun pressing so close to me with such a serious expression on his face made my heartbeat increase tenfold. "Um… I think so? Heh heh, I guess my condition's a little better today."

Just as the tone of my voice started warming up, he released his hold on my shoulders and turned around to face away from me. Then, still looking away, he whispered as if talking to himself. "Is your condition really better, or is it worse…?"

"…Eh? What do you mean?"

"It's nothing", Masuda-kun shook his head, and began speaking in a commanding tone. "Go lie on the bed. We have to begin today's treatment."

With my mind still reverberating with the beats of my heart, I removed my backpack and set it aside. Then, I lay down on the bed occupied by Matsuda-kun until just a few minutes ago. As I let my body soak into the soft mat, my nose was filled with the scent of the sheets. Matsuda-kun's scent. I sniffed his scent as I felt the remains of his body warmth engulf my body, and felt as happy as if he was lying next to me, hugging me softly –

"Heheheheheheheh", I laughed an instinctive happy laugh. "heheheheheheh".

"…Is something funny?", Matsuda-kun grimaced and gave me a hard look. "I realize that's the way dung-beetles laugh, but even though you are one, it's just too gross. Can't you at least try to laugh normally?"

"Hyo hyo hyo hyo hyo"

"What's normal about that? That's even grosser!" Shocked, Matsuda-kun rolled a trolley noisily from the center of the lab. On top of it were several complicated, important-looking machines. He pushed the trolley up to the bed, said "here we go", and started operating one of the machines with a tense expression on his face.

I found myself staring at him work. Silky soft hair. Long almond eyes peeking through it. Long feminine eyelashes. A pointed jaw. Small pale lips. Long white fingers –

"Stop looking at me, Ugly. It's creepy."

…And a sharp tongue.

That's right. That's my Matsuda-kun. I rolled to my side and wrote a note in my notebook.

"…You don't have to write everything down, dung-beetle."

"But, if I don't write it down I'd forget it all!"

Matsuda-kun let out an exaggerated sigh. "…Honestly, your brain's like a bottomless bucket."

A bottomless bucket. It wasn't another one of his cruel jokes. It was true. I forget everything I see and hear after a very short time. I don't know the reason. If I ever knew, I've forgotten it.

But, whatever the reason may be, my forgetfulness is not normal. Of that I'm certain.

"But, it's not like I'm forgetting things because I want to. There's a sickness in my brain, right? I can't help it, so be nice to me!"

"No, I don't think we can just call it 'sickness' and be done with it", Matsuda-kun shook his head lightly. "The human memory is a complicated thing and there is much we don't know about it. It's still very much a black box. Your situation isn't just a simple sickness that can be dealt with like any other." As he explained, he stuck suction pads all over my head and my face.The cords running from the suction pads were attached to the machines on the trolley. "There's a part of the human memory that we call 'episodic memory'. It stores your personal experiences, what you see and hear. The area of the brain responsible for it is called the hippocampus. If something goes wrong there, the brain experiences difficulties in creating and storing new episodes. There's a famous old example about a patient who had the hippocampus removed in surgery and lost all ability to form new memories. After that happened, there has been much research done about the exact role of the hippocampus in relation to memory. That said, even if your hippocampus is malfunctioning, you won't lose your ability to remember or learn 'procedural memory' tasks such as riding a bicycle or using tools. You won't remember the episodes related to those tasks, though. For example, you may remember how to ride a bicycle, but you won't remember how you came to be able to ride them… That's it in a nutshell."

"I see… So that's why even though I am very forgetful, I still know how to read and write in my notebook". I held the notebook in question with both of my hands, and nodded thoughtfully.

"Ryouko Otonashi's Memory Notebook"

That notebook was memory itself for me. My one and only indispensable trusted item. As long as I have it, I can probably live a regular life, much like regular people. That said, it seems that this school is a little late in accommodating the memory-challenged, and that I am still facing many difficulties on that front. For example, during exams it's forbidden to look in notebooks, which caused my grades to plummet and got me suspended from –

"What? I've been suspended from the school?!", I yelled, looking up from the notebook. "Just because my grades are bad?! That's not fair!"

"You should be glad they haven't kicked you out completely. I had to negotiate with the school to make that happen."

"Eh? You stood up for me?". My heart skipped a beat. "I'm so happy! Heh heh. You really are fond of me, aren't you."

Matsuda-kun snorted. "…I just need you here as a research subject."

Nevertheless, Matsuda-kun went out and helped me, and that's good enough!

"Your case seems to involve a failure in the retrieval of long-term memory. I think something went wrong with the synapses connecting the neurons somewhere in your brain, but I need more time to investigate the problem more thoroughly before I can really understand what's going on."

"I didn't understand most of what you said, but… at least I haven't been expelled! If I get expelled now, where would I even go?" I don't have anywhere to go to outside this school. I've forgotten everything else. I don't even remember my family, or any old friends I may or may not have. "If I get expelled, I will also end up away from you, Matsuda-kun…"

Being separated from Matsuda-kun was the thing I feared most. My body shivered a little just speaking the words out loud.

"You shouldn't worry too much." Matsuda-kun turned to face me and spoke bluntly. "You are a valuable research subject and I don't plan to lose you… at least not at the moment."

"But, you might change your mind later!"

I'm happy, but I have to remember not to be too much of a burden from now on!

"Don't complain. You should be honored that you're participating in such important research." Matsuda-kun chided me, and then continued his explanation. "In order to understand why memory loss occurs, we need to understand the core elements of our brain's memory storage apparatus. Once we make advances in that field, it opens the doors to a wide array of possibilities, like improving the quality and longevity of human memory, or developing medicine to prevent memory loss. In the future, we might even be able to treat memories like we do data on a hard drive - we'll be able to create devices that back them up or destroy parts of them freely. There's already research going on that front abroad. They managed to erase lab rats' long-term memory by manipulating their M-zeta kinase enzyme."

"I see!"

In fact, I didn't see at all, but for the time being I had to be agreeable. "In any case, I'm just super-happy that I can be any help to my beloved Matsuda-kun!"

"Your brain is empty, and so are the words it produces. You really are an empty woman."

I didn't quite understand if he was serious or just making fun of me.

But, that's just how Matsuda-kun is.

He always insisted I should take care of myself. He may be cold to me and he may be blunt, but he doesn't treat me with fake sympathy. It's depressing when people do, so I'm grateful for his attitude.

"I may be empty but I'm still super-happy!" I raised my voice, refusing to be discouraged, but Matsuda-kun's reply was almost a whisper.

"Well, I can't deny you're helping me out here. One doesn't get his hands on such a rare case very often…"

"Did you say rare?! I like the sound of that word!" I felt as happy as if I was being praised. "So what's rare about me? Tell me! Tell me! Tell me!"

"Stop acting like a child.", Matsuda-kun let out a big sigh. "I don't want to tell you. You'd just get annoyingly excited."

"What's so wrong with that? Tell me! Tell me!"

My insistence finally paid off. "…You don't often see someone possessing such a superb, brain-intensive talent as you do affected by memory loss. That's why you're such a rare case."

"…Talent? Brain-intensive?" Nothing came to my mind.

"It's fine if you don't remember it… It was really irritating when you used that talent of yours. I'm warning you - don't ever try to use it on me. You got that, dung-beetle?"

I didn't quite get what he meant, but his dung-beetle comment stung my heart a little bit so I couldn't help but nod in agreement. "Well, I don't really care as long as I get to spend these intimate moments with you, Matsuda-kun. I should be thankful that there's sickness in my brain!"

"I told you, it's not really a sickness…" Matsuda-kun stuck even more suction cups to my head, as if he was trying to hide my grinning face. "Nevertheless, It's admirable that you can take this so easily. Your condition is no laughing matter. Shouldn't you be at least a little worried?"

"…Eh? What is there to be worried about?"

"I mean", said Matsuda-kun in amazement, "aren't you worried whether these symptoms are ever going to go away?"

"…Eh?" His words surprised me. It wasn't like Matsuda-kun at all, asking a question like that in such a serious voice. "Ahahaha! I'm not worried at all!", I laughed, trying to lighten the mood. "I mean, the only me I can remember is the me that is lying here on this bed at this very moment. I can't remember anything from before I lost like memory, so it's not like I have anything to compare it too. That's why I don't see my forgetfulness as a disadvantage… it's just a part of who I am."

"You don't see it as a disadvantage… but aren't you even worried about how this memory loss started, or when it's going to end?"

"Not at all. In fact, I'm much more worried that if I suddenly get cured I wouldn't get to see you any more, Matsuda-kun."

The room suddenly turned quiet.

After the silence continued for a while, Matsuda-kun broke it with a whisper.

"You don't have to worry" He said, his voice suddenly dark. "I won't let this treatment end."

I looked up. The face peeking through his pitch-black hair was stiff, lost in thought.

"Matsuda-kun?"

As soon as I called him, he straightened up and turned back to me.

"No, it's nothing…" He shook his head, as if trying to smooth things over. Then, he returned to the machine and continued working it as if nothing happened. "Well, nothing good can come out of being too pessimistic about of your symptoms. That's one case where your natural cheerfulness is actually helpful."

"Yep! My thinking's very flexible, after all!"

"Your head is flexible, that's for sure. You can't even remember your friends or family before you lost your memory, and yet you aren't even slightly disconcerted."

"But, forgetting them is just like I never had them at all! That's why everyone I forgot – they really have nothing to do with me anymore!"

"Those words again." Matsuda-kun winked for an awfully long time. "If you keep saying things have nothing to do with you, you're going to end up with nothing left inside."

"Oh, I'll be fine! I will always have you, Matsuda-kun!", I stuck my chest in pride. "You're the only person I can remember, so as long as you're here, I won't get lonely."

"…You probably link me with the process of coming here to receive this treatment in your procedural memory. That's why you can remember me."

"No, that's not it at all –"

"Yeah, yeah. I know", said Matsuda-kun, trying to calm me down before I became too flustered.

He continued attaching suction cups to my face, stopping from time to time to scratch his chest, which I could catch a glimpse of through a gap in his dirty white shirt. Does he really know what I meant? He probably just said that to shut me up. I don't think he even believed me when I said I remembered him.

But it's true.

I don't remember him in the usual sense of the word "remember", of course. But I didn't lie when I said I do.

I remember Matsuda-kun.

I forget him, and yet I remember.

I'm not talking about our conversations, or what we did together. For these kind of memories I have to rely on my notebook. No, what I remember is something much more special and important!

It's not memories, but feelings. Not using my head, but using my heart. What I remember about Matsuda-kun is pure emotion. Every time I see him, I feel my the beat of my heart before my head even realizes what's going on. That beat tells me one very important thing.

For me, his very existence is precious. One-of-a-kind.

That's why, no matter how forgetful I become, I will never forget him. There's a connection deeper than memories between the two of us. For me, Matsuda-kun is special. He's extraordinary. He's a miracle –

"Shut up already, will you?"

"Eh?", I came back to my senses, confused. "Y…You heard me?". I was about to jump out of the bed, but Matsuda-kun pinned my head back down.

"You're going to get the cord disconnected. What are you, human waste?", he said cruelly, as if I tried disconnect his cord on purpose.

"B…But, I never said a word… Ah, were you talking about how loud my heartbeat is? I can't help that! If my heart stops, I'd die!"

"…I wasn't talking about you. I was referring to the noise outside."

"Eh? Outside?"

Matsuda-kun turned up his chin, and pointed to the window. When I listened intently, I could indeed hear an unusual noise coming from outside.

Jeering voices, angry voices, hooting voices. Reactionary voices full of anger. The kind of voices that could make the earth rumble. It was an assembly of unpleasant voices that could make your face frown instinctively.

"…What is that?"

"It's the 'Parade'. They're getting louder every day…"

"A parade? You don't mean, that parade?!"

"Liar. You don't remember it at all." Matsuda-kun pinched my forehead, and continued explaining. His face was grim. "It's essentially a demonstration. But the teaching staff, or maybe I should say the old geezers in the steering committee, didn't like the sound of that word so they decided to call it a stupid name like a 'Parade'".

"…But, isn't a parade the exact opposite of a demonstration?"

"That's exactly why they chose that name"

"But, why a parade…?"

"It's the guys from the preparatory school."

"Preparatory school…?" I've never heard of such a thing. Or have I?

"You don't remember, of course. Well, your head is oversized, so I guess it can't be helped."

"Wait! Calling a girl oversized is a sexual harassment! If this was the Edo period you would be beheaded by now – eep!" My head, which was on its way up from the bed, was pushed back down.

"Hope's Peak Academy is not a traditional learning facility like other schools. They provide education for the talented, but at the same time they research that talent. The teaching staff aren't simple educators. They're also scientists who research human talent. …But, scientists are a bothersome bunch. The more they research, the more they want to research even deeper. Therefore, there's something they never have enough of. Do you know what that is?"

"Um… It's probably…"

"It's money."

"Oh, right!" My chance to find the answer on my own was gone, so that's the least I could say.

"Up until recently, Hope's Peak Academy was a small-scale facility that could survive on a government subsidiary and graduate donations. Their research was often blocked by a lack of resources, though. But, the steering committee was not satisfied with the state of the research, so they instituted the preparatory school system in order to bring in more money."

I nodded enthusiastically to show I was listening.

"The gist of it is that us Super High-school Levels are affiliated with the main school, but there is now a separate educational facility attached to it, called a preparatory school. That school is located on the west quarter of the campus, while the main school remains here in the east quarter, so we don't actually intermingle much. I heard there's not much that's the same over there – they don't scout their students, and rely on a regular entrance exam to choose among applicants. Their teaching staff is chosen the same way. Our teachers are the scientists who work and live at the school, while they have regular teachers coming from outside."

"So, it's just a regular high-school, isn't it?"

"Exactly. Nevertheless, there was a flood of applications. A brand name is a powerful thing." Matsuda-kun almost spat the words out. "People didn't care that it was just a preparatory school. The prestigious Hope's Peak Academy had finally opened its doors to the public. People are sheep. They are drawn to a name, and the school took advantage of that to get more money. Thanks to that, the school went through a sudden growth sprout. We suddenly have research

buildings that can make any university jealous. No one was prepared for that – in just a year or two Hope's Peak Academy became a school of an entirely different scale. The power of the steering committee also grew accordingly."

"But, that almost seems like a fraud…"

"It doesn't just seem like one." Matsuda-kun's mouth twisted in a bitter smile. "Right now, Hope's Peak Academy is set up like a third world country's pyramid class system. The multitude of students in the preparatory school exist only to support the few Super High-school Levels in the main one. It seems they have some kind of bogus system in place for exceptional students to transfer to the main school, but I've never heard of anyone actually succeeding. Our teachers probably don't think any of them deserve it."

"Eh? That's not how educators should behave!"

"You're right, but it's exactly how scientists do. They don't care about anything but their research subject. I'm just the same, in fact. It's just that their subject is 'human talent'."

"But, it's so unfair!" I puffed my cheeks.

"Of course it is. If it wasn't, there wouldn't be any need for a demonstration, would there? But, still…"

Matsuda-kun suddenly cut his speech short. His tone of voice changed to a cautious one.

"I don't think they could've set all this up on their own. This has to be the result of someone else's scheme. That's how I feel…"

"Eh?"

Matsuda-kun narrowed his eyes and looked outside the window. His look was so grim that I hesitated to speak.

"Hey, Ugly," after a short while he turned back to me, as if remembering something. "Write this conversation down properly in your notebook. Don't brush it off as having nothing to do with you. Those preparatory school students don't think much of us. I don't think they're going to attack you or anything, but… it's better to be cautious."

"Okay, I understand.", as I replied, I noticed the suction cups stuck to my head and my face were making it difficult to move my mouth.

"I need you to stay still for a while. I don't mind if you sleep." Matsuda-kun stepped away from my line of sight.

"But, I'm not sleepy at all…" I replied in an insecure voice. Matsuda-kun's voice answered from the other side of the room.

"I can give you sleeping pills. A dozen should probably be enough."

"Eh? Isn't that a lethal dose? Are you sure it's alright?"

As soon as my uneasiness grew even deeper, Matsuda-kun appeared in front of me again. He was now wearing a school jacket on top of his dirty shirt.

"If something happens to my machines while I'm gone, you're dead."

"…Are you going somewhere?"

"I have a little business to take care of. Anyway, if something happens to my machines, you're dead." He was serious enough to repeat the warning twice.

"I wouldn't mind being killed if it's you who kills me…"

"It would be troublesome for me. I hate gore."

I didn't think that was such a good quality for someone who studies the human brain, but I didn't say anything.

"Ah! In that case, if I stay here and wait like a good girl, let's go see a movie together later!"

"…A movie?"

"Um… You know, like that one…"

I flipped through the pages of my notebook, searching for memories about movies.

"Here's one! Um, it's about two robbers, Harry and Marv, sneaking into the McAllister household…"

"Are you talking about Home Alone? It seems you've forgotten, but you bugged me to see it with you before, and we did."

"Really? Um, in that case…" I continue flipping through the notebook, but couldn't find mention of any other movies. It seems I was particularly interested in that movie. I could blame myself all day, but it'd get me nowhere.

"W…Well, it's a masterpiece, so I'm sure it's still interesting even if you watch it again!"

"It's certainly not a bad movie, but it's not the kind of movie I'd want to watch again and again…"

"So, what kind of movie do you –"

"Please don't ask me questions fit for the diary of a middle-school girl"

I felt his distasteful stare glaring down at me. But, I didn't give up. "Let's do it! If you pretend you're watching for the first time, it's going to be fun!". I read a little more in my notebook. "Ah! According to this, I thought that the little boy who played the main character, Wacooly Culkin, is super-cute! There's a cute boy in this movie! Isn't this exciting?"

"And why, exactly, do you think that would excite me? Also, that actor isn't named as if he was a brand of lingerie. It's Macaulay Culkin."

"Ha ha, it says here that I thought he was so cute I wanted to adopt him!"

"You only say that because you don't know how he looks today. He underwent quite a transformation."

"A transformation, huh…"

Matsuda-kun narrowed his almond eyes even more than usual, and swiped his bangs away from his forehead.

"Just be a good girl and go to sleep."

It seems he was tired of me trying to postpone his departure.

"Wait! Don't go!" Nevertheless, now panicking, I tried to stop him again. "I don't want you to go! I'd be lonely! Don't leave me here alone! We haven't seen each other in a long time, have we?"

"…A long time?" Matsuda-kun stopped in his tracks. "Why do you think we haven't seen each other in a long time?"

"…Eh?"

"I'm asking why you think we haven't seen each other in a long time."

Matsuda-kun faced away from me as he spoke. His voice was tinted with pain, and made me feel anxious.

"Um… I can tell by the rate my heart was beating… I think…"

"So, if you see me every day your heart doesn't beat as fast when I'm near?"

"N…No! That's not it –"

"We did meet just yesterday, you know."

"…Eh? We did?"

"It's not surprising that you forgot…" Matsuda-kun's back curled forward, as if he was dejected. "I guess you were just lying when you said I'm the only one you can remember."

"W…Wait! I'll remember in a second!"

In haste, I flipped through the pages of my notebook. I went through them all from back to back, but I couldn't find any memories of me and Matsuda-kun meeting the day before. It was a complete failure.

When I looked away from the notebook, Matsuda-kun was already gone.

"…feh!" I've been had. And there was nothing more I could do about it.

Sigh. I guess there really is nothing I can do but sleep.

Not that that's such a bad thing.

At the very least, when I'm asleep I can lose myself inside my dreams. I can escape this lonely world that doesn't have Matsuda-kun in it. I can probably even meet Matsuda-kun in my dreams!

With that thought deep in my heart, I rolled to my side, careful not to disturb the cords all over my head, and sniffed the pillow that still had traces of Matsuda-kun's scent. I sniffed it as if I was a puppy, and rubbed my cheeks against it, purring happily. Then, I closed my eyes.

As my vision blacked out, my other senses sharpened. Before long, the only thing remaining in my world was Matsuda-kun's scent…

No, that wasn't the only thing.

I could also hear voices, interfering with my and Matsuda-kun's private world. An assembly of emotional, unsettling voices. Anxiety washed over my entire body just by listening to them, so I blocked my ears in panic.

…It has nothing to do with me, after all.

Nevertheless, I couldn't sleep. I felt like my body forgot how to.

I want to fall asleep.

I want to sleep and tide over this world that doesn't have Matsuda-kun in it.

I want to meet him again.

…Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun.

And then, as I dreamed about dreaming about Matsuda-kun, I slowly fell into a blissful sleep.

CHAPTER 4

A short while after leaving the laboratory, Yasuke Matsuda stood in front of a large door that exuded a solemn atmosphere and straightened his posture.

What are you so nervous about? He wanted to mock himself, but at the same time realized nervousness was inevitable. It was the first time he'd ever stepped into Hope's Peak Academy's inner sanctum, the staff building. It was the only building on the campus' east quarter that students were forbidden to enter, and sure enough - once he did he ended up having to explain the situation to several teachers who stopped him along the way. That wasn't enough, though - his final destination was itself a special place, even inside this forbidden building.

Yasuke Matsuda raised his head and stared at the door in front of him.

It was a pretentiously decorated wooden door that gave him the feeling visitors weren't welcome. The metal plate set in it read "Hope's Peak Academy's Steering Committee Meeting Room". This was the inner sanctum's inner sanctum. Even the teaching staff could not just walk in uninvited. Nervousness really was inevitable for someone about to enter such a special room. But, nevertheless –

"This really isn't like me…"

Matsuda cleared his throat. He tried to cheer himself up before he ended up swallowed whole by the oppressing

atmosphere. Then, he raised his fist and knocked twice on the door.

"This is Yasuke Matsuda, from Hope's Peak Academy's 77th class", he announced, slowly pushing the heavy door open. "…Excuse me."

The room was as different from a classroom as a room could be. The ceiling, pillars and walls were excessively decorated, in a way that Matsuda found gloomy. He stepped forward, the sound of his footsteps swallowed by the thick carpet.

"We apologize for calling you here on such a short notice". The voice was surprisingly light and cheerful. It belonged to Hope's Peak Academy's headmaster, Jin Kirigiri. Every time Matsuda saw the man he couldn't help but be astounded how young he was. In his mind, a headmaster was a middle-aged man with white hair, a mustache and a drab suit. Kirigiri, still in his thirties, was just too young for the job.

"Please sit down. It would be easier to have a conversation that way."

A large circular table stood in the middle of the room. Antique chairs were lined up all around it. "Excuse me", said Matsuda as he sat on the nearest chair, placing him exactly across the table from Kirigiri. The moment he sat down, he felt several pairs of eyes staring intently at him. They belonged to four old men who sat around the table at set intervals. Every one of them wore a pitch-black suit, as if they were on their way back from a funeral. Their ties were the same color. Their appraising glare felt to Matsuda as if someone was breathing their hot breath down the back of his neck.

"Do you know who we are?"

The voice was rusty, and Matsuda couldn't tell which old man it belonged to.

"You must be the members of Hope's Peak Academy Steering Committee."

"You have our sincere gratitude for all your help with that incident".

"……I don't know what you're talking about."

The wrinkles on the old men's faces deepened. They didn't like dodging around the topic of the conversation.

"There is no need to be cautious here. We know everything", one of the old men said. "You helped us with the interrogation of the student who first discovered the crime scene, didn't you?", said another.

The student who first discovered the crime scene. The second Matsuda heard those words, his heart began to beat faster. He tried to hide it by asking a question of his own. "…Do you intend to try and get more information out of that student?"

"Not at all", a different old man shook his hand. "This time, we are dealing with a different student. We have a problem, you see. A problem that someone with your skills can solve. We are looking forward for your help". He talked as if the matter was already settled. That was worrying.

"…What if I refuse?"

A few seconds of silence later, one of the old men started to laugh. It was a quiet laugh at first, but soon the second, third, and then the fourth old man joined, filling the room with scornful laughter. Their voices descended on Matsuda from every angle.

"So, Matsuda-kun", the laughter suddenly stopped. "Do you really believe you have a choice in the matter?" The old man spoke in a condescending tone of voice. "That girl you've been treating… It seems she's on temporary leave from the school, yet there aren't any signs that she's going to be cured."

This time, it was Matsuda's wrinkles that deepened as he frowned. "…What are you trying to say?"

"You are also still a student. We can't have you wasting your time on a dunce with no hope of recovery". His words were overflowing with contempt. "The way we see it, we can't keep extending a student's temporary leave when we don't even know when she'll be able to return. This faculty's purpose is to nurture talent. Those who are too much of a failure to use it should simply step down, for the other students' sake… That said, if you agree to help us…"

"Shut the fuck up, old man."

"…Wha–!"

"Your dirty mouth talks too much."

The room's atmosphere changed in a second. The air pressure jumped all at once.

"Y…You bastard…!"

Matsuda stood up and the old men froze. He looked at them as if they were worms. No, his stare was much more angry and full of contempt – he looked as them as if they were worms he was about to trample.

"Dunce? Failure? I should've warned you. I am the only one who's allowed to make fun of her. No one else has any right to."

"H…Hey! Who do you think you're talki–"

"I told you to shut up."

His tone really did shut them up. He continued speaking in a low voice.

"That girl… Even when people make fun of her, she swipes it off because she thinks it has 'nothing to do with her'. That's why I have to speak up for her. I won't be able to live with myself if I don't."

To the ears of the Steering Committee members, his words carried an indescribable sense of intimidation. How can we be so overpowered by someone not yet in his twenties? They did not know the answer.

They did not understand the power someone who possessed talent had. The power Hope's Peak Academy called "Hope".

"…Um, may I interrupt?" A slow voice forced its way into the conversation. It was Kirigiri's voice. Matsuda turned his coercive stare towards him.

"It's just that I think It's time for me to say something…" Kirigiri smiled bitterly and scratched his head. Despite the nervous atmosphere that filled the room, he seemed completely calm. Matsuda, having lost his momentum, closed his eyes slowly, let out a heavy sigh and sat back down. As soon as he was done, Kirigiri continued in a quiet tone.

"Matsuda-kun, we are merely asking for a favor. Not a favor just for us – you can consider it a favor to every student of Hope's Peak Academy. Would you please at least consider listening to what we have to say?"

Matsuda stayed quiet and looked at Kirigiri, unable to judge what the man's true intentions were. Kirigiri, on his part, tried his best to take back control of the situation. "I won't ask you to do anything other than listen. If you decide to refuse, we will accept your decision". With the preliminaries done, he moved straight to the topic on hand.

"I probably do not have to explain to you about that incident, but we should probably still begin there anyway". Kirigiri cleared his throat, clasped both his hands in front of himself, and continued. "It's been a month and we still can't believe what had happened. Such a gruesome incident taking place inside Hope's Peak Academy… I still feel like we're living in a nightmare."

"But, it really did happen!", yelled one of the old men.

"Thirteen kids!", screamed another. "Thirteen victims, and the details of what happened are still unclear! Why did such a terrible thing happen in our school?!"

When the screaming voices stopped, Matsuda said what has been on his mind. "So… you never informed the police?"

"Of course we didn't! What do you think would happen if we did?! What would it solve?! This is not a problem that can be taken care of by arresting a culprit!"

"But… what about the victims' families?"

"We're taking care of that!" yet another old man yelled without skipping a beat. "You don't have to worry about such things!"

Judging by the way he spoke, the academy had already taken measures for dealing with the families. They must have asked some favors from previous graduates. Many of them rose to high positions on the strength of the Hope's Peak brand - if that brand falls from grace, they will also lose it all.

"…You're right, I shouldn't have to worry about that. So, what is it that you want me to do? This 'other student' you were talking about – they must have something to do with this incident as well, right?"

"We want you to extract information out of that student that will help clarifying the truth behind this incident", answered Kirigiri.

"Clarify the truth…? Isn't that a contradiction? Didn't you decide to cover up the incident?"

The cover-up. Matsuda was the only student the faculty trusted with the secret. In exchange for his cooperation, he was awarded a large research grant and equipment for his lab. That was probably another proof that he was a true scientist.

But, that wasn't the only reason he agreed to cooperate. No one but Matsuda himself knew the other reasons.

"Yes, it does sound like a contradiction, doesn't it", answered Kirigiri after a short hesitation. "But, this is a necessity. We strongly believe that hiding this incident is necessary, but there is too much we still don't know about. We can't hide something we don't completely understand. That's why we think we must find the entire story regarding what happened back then. In order to protect Hope's Peak Academy… this cover-up has to be perfect."

Kirigiri said all that without the slightest sign of doubt. He would do anything to protect Hope's Peak Academy. He's

just like me, isn't he?, Matsuda thought.

Sacrificing something to protect something else - That's exactly what I'm also doing right now.

"…So who is this student you want me to interrogate?"

Kirigiri licked his dry lips, and gave Matsuda a cautious answer. "We didn't tell you this before, but other than the first discoverer of the crime scene, there are two additional survivors."

Two survivors… Sure enough, that was the first time Matsuda heard about them.

"They are indispensable for discovering the truth about the incident, of course. Had all been well, we should've questioned them immediately after we were done with the crime scene's discoverer… But, because of certain circumstances, we couldn't do that."

"…Circumstances?"

"One of them has been in a coma since the incident. The other, thankfully, came out unhurt, but… went missing soon after. We do not know where that student is right now."

One comatose student, and one missing student. The circumstances were indeed severe. But, there was still a possibility –

"You want me to try and get information from the comatose student, don't you?"

Kirigiri nodded. "Exactly."

Finding the truth in order to hide it. It was certainly a twisted thing to do, but it was also very convenient for Matsuda.

This is probably my chance. My chance to protect her.

"I understand", he said. He had no other choice. "I'll see what I can do."

"Do you think you can do something?" One of the old men quickly relaxed and tried to regain authority.

"It's still too early to tell. It depends on the student's exact condition. I will try my best, in any case", Matsuda answered bluntly, and returned to face Kirigiri. "But, what about the missing student? You aren't going to just sit here doing nothing, are you?"

After a short silence, Kirigiri bent forward and looked straight into Matsuda's eyes. "…Is something worrying you?"

His gaze was sharp, and Matsuda felt as if it could read his innermost thoughts. Wanting to escape it, he retracted quickly. "No, I was just curious". His voice was shaky, and he continued in an effort to hide it. "I mean, a missing student is far too suspicious, isn't it? Don't you think they could be the culprit who killed thirteen students and left one in a coma?"

The old men immediately started rustling, their whispers reverberating through the meeting room. Kirigiri alone kept his cool.

"It's just as you say. The way things look, that student is extremely suspicious."

"In that case –"

"In that case, what?" Kirigiri interrupted forcefully. "It just justifies covering-up this incident even more. If we don't… it's going to be the end of this school."

The end of this school…?

Matsuda was intrigued by Kirigiri's expression.

Does that mean that the student who has gone missing is someone special?

A certain name suddenly found itself floating in the back of Matsuda's mind. He had heard that name only in rumors and in occult stories he always thought were urban legends. But, if that person really exists, they may very well be involved in this incident.

If that's the case, it all makes sense. It even makes sense calling this incident "The Worst Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History".

It makes sense, but it's also terrible.

A single drop of sweat fell down from Matsuda's temple as he whispered those words deep inside his heart.

CHAPTER 5

Siiiiigh……
Zzzzzzzzzz…
Zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz……GYAAAAAAAAH!

I jumped to my feet at the sudden pain of my skin being pulled violently, and saw a boy standing at my bedside with a jumble of cords attached to suction cups in his hands. My heart started beating fast.

"Ah! It's Matsuda-kun, isn't it? Isn't it!?"

Not wasting a second, I leaped straight into him, but just like a matador he nimbly stepped aside. My head crashed into the wall as if I was the coyote, tricked by the Road Runner. I could see stars spinning around my head.

"Ugugugu… Why are you avoiding me…?"

"Because you have a swollen face."

"Y…You can't go calling a girl's face swollen…!", I turned my shaky feet and peeked into a mirror I found on top of one desk. My face was packed with violet-blue specks the size of small coins… Swollen, sure enough.

"B…But, that's because you pulled those suction cups off my face so violently, Matsuda-kun!"

"I was in a hurry."

"Oh, I wouldn't mind if you go right here!"

"……I'm not in a hurry because I have to use the toilet."

"Of course, how silly of me! Matsuda-kun never has to use the toilet at all!"

"What do you even think I am, Ugly?"

"You're the most sublime being in human history, of course!"

"Don't include me in your ridiculous delusions…", Matsuda-kun exhaled a big breath, as if giving up. "I've had enough. If I keep talking to you I'd go weird in the head too". He started tidying up the trolley. "Anyway, I have more business to attend to today. Go home, quickly now."

"Eh? But whyyyyy!?" Naturally, I strongly objected to the proposition. "I don't wanna! I'd be lonely!"

"Honestly, you're such an annoying girl…" Matsuda-kun narrowed his eyes and slowly stepped in front of my face. He grasped both of my shoulders tenderly. "Close your eyes."

"……Eh?"

"Just do it, close them."

As my heart beat rhythmically at Matsuda-kun drawing near before my eyes, I did as I was told and closed them. My entire body became hot. I felt as if I was about to melt. The blood vessels behind my ears pulsed violently. This situation could only mean one thing, right?! It's a terrible cliche, but what else could it be?! It is, isn't it? It is!

Then, as the anticipation made my heart go boom boom boom, I felt Matsuda-kun moving behind me. Before I could even wonder what was going on, he started pushing me forward. In a second, I was thrown out into the corridor.

"Ow!"

I collapsed on the corridor's floor from the excessive force of Matsuda-kun's shove. It was a small mercy that I had clean underpants on.

"The next treatment is in three days. Be a good girl and stay in your room. Don't go out on needless walks", said Matsuda-kun before I could even get up, and then shut the door loudly behind him.

"Uuuu… He tricked me…"

My shoulders drooped, but since there was nothing I could do I simply left the neurology lab, crestfallen. As I exited the biology building, the first thing I did was check my notebook. I had to go back to the dorms, but since I forgot where they were, I flipped through the pages of "Ryouko Otonashi's Memory Notebook" as I walked. Eventually, I found the school map it seemed I drew all by myself. I guess this is a good time to do a full scale review of my notes, and explain the full picture regarding Hope's Peak Academy.

Here we go.

According to my map, Hope's Peak Academy's campus is shaped like a large diamond. It's divided into four quarters - East, West, South and North, each the size of a full-scale regular high-school. The East quarter - through which I walked now - was the heart of the academy, where the buildings and facilities used by the main school are located. Many of its buildings were still under construction, but there were also several magnificent, envy-inducing research buildings for

various fields, much like Matsuda-kun's Biology Building. In addition, it seems this quarter is also home to the staff building, which students are forbidden to enter.

Then there's the west quarter. It seems the buildings and facilities for the preparatory school are located there, but I don't think I've ever visited it. Unfortunately, there isn't much written in my notebook about it.

The south quarter is where Hope's Peak Academy's student dormitories are. In addition, it seems there's a convenience store, a bookstore, and various other shops where necessary supplies can be bought. By the way, it seems only students belonging to the main school are allowed to live in the dorms, and that it's a special perk that doesn't even cost money.

Then there's the north quarter, which is apparently currently vacant. The only thing left there is the old school building, which was still in use until just recently. For the time being it seems it's been left neglected, so naturally entrance is forbidden. In other words, there isn't much to say about it.

Finally, at the very center of the campus, surrounded by the four quarters, is the "central plaza" - a large park-like space overgrown with trees. It's often used as a relaxation area for the students, but it appears entry is forbidden between 10 at night and 7 in the morning. Well, I don't plan on walking around in the middle of the night, so it seems it has nothing to do with me.

…And so, thanks to the information-packed hand drawn map, I managed to make my way to the dorms safely. Then, ignoring the greetings of the students who passed me by in the corridor, I went straight to my room.

When I entered the room, I was met with stickers reading "This is my room" stuck all around. Yep, this is the right place, there's no question about it! After confirming this important fact, I stood near the doorway for a while staring into space. But, no matter how much I tried I couldn't think of anything I wanted to do, so eventually I simply collapsed into my bed. Nevertheless, it seems I already took a midday nap somewhere, because I couldn't fall asleep.

Reluctantly, I decided to kill some time. For me, killing time means exactly one thing. I took out "Ryouko Otonashi's Memory Notebook" and, still lying on the bed, started flipping through its pages.

Everything that's written down in this notebook is the undeniable truth, but I can't remember any of it. In other words, it feels like I'm reading a non-fiction book about myself. The excitement of experiencing my own past vicariously is an amazing form of entertainment that only someone as forgetful as myself can enjoy.

I read about what I talked with Matsuda-kun about, and what he said to me. Most of the notebook was about Matsuda-kun, but that's exactly what makes it so much fun. Then, as I continued flipping through the notebook, my eyes stopped on one single page.

That page was packed with sketches of a boy's face. My heartbeat… wasn't as fast as it could be but increased slightly in speed.

These are probably portraits of Matsuda-kun. But, since my heart isn't beating that fast, they're probably not very good likenesses. Maybe I should try to make some amendments?

"Hmmm… I think the nose is all wrong. No, maybe it's the eyes…?"

I can't really remember what Matsuda-kun's face looks like, but I used my heartbeat as a measure and carefully took to redrawing the sketches. That's probably how bomb disposal personnel feel when they go searching for land mines. No, I guess it's a little different.

And so, after messing with the portrait for a little bit, I felt my heart beating a little bit faster than it did before.

"I did it…", I couldn't wipe the smile off my face. If I just continue fiddling with the sketch little by little, I'm sure it will eventually look just like the real Matsuda-kun. I probably did the exact same thing before – I just don't remember it. It's just that working on this sketch requires every bit of my concentration, and I can't keep it up for very long. Tired, I placed the notebook next to my pillow, and turned to lie face up. Then, I started to whisper.

…I want to meet Matsuda-kun. I want to meet Matsuda-kun. I want to meet Matsuda-kun.

It was the only thing I could do. Right now, the only thing I can do is whisper deep inside my heart how much I want to meet Matsuda-kun. There is nothing else I can think about. Nothing else I can do. Nothing else I should do. I can't remember anything else, after all. Not even my family or my other classmates. For me, the people living in the outside world and what they do feels just like watching a boring stage play from the sidelines. I can't treat them as real beings. I don't even feel I live in the same world they do. Noisy classrooms, sweat-drenched PE lessons, festive lunchtimes, stopping to grab a bite after club activities, sitting on the ground chatting with friends, embarrassing conversations with the family… I can't even feel envy or regret that I'm missing these things out. They simply have nothing to do with me, and that's it.

But, the only existence keeping me from being entirely cut off from the world… is Matsuda-kun.

And that's why I can't think of anything else but him.

I don't stop for a second to think about any other thing. I want to meet Matsuda-kun. I want to meet Matsuda-kun. I want to mee– Thump.

There was a strange sound, and I came back to my senses. I raised myself from the bed, and found a letter shoved under the room's door.

"It's from Matsuda-kun!"

It was the logical conclusion to make, and so I jumped to grab the envelope, and hurried to read the letter inside.

"Dear Ms. Super High-school Level Pitiful Forgetful Girl,
I have taken all the precious "past memories" you have so meticulously chronicled.
There are a lot of them, and they all chronicle your past with Yasuke Matsuda.
That's the entire weight of your past right there, isn't it?
Isn't it? Isn't it?
By the way, if you think I am lying just look under your bed.
That's where you stored all your "memories", but there isn't even a single one left.
That's because I took them all.
Well, then, let's get to the main issue.
If you want your "memories" back, come to the fountain in the central plaza tonight at 1AM.
Come alone, of course.
It's not like you even have anyone to call, is it?
That's fine, then.
That's all. Thank you for your cooperation. I am looking forward to hearing from you."

My body stiffened as I finished reading the letter. It stiffened, and yet it also quivered like a plate of jelly. In other words, I was so disturbed that the previous simile seemed appropriate.

…A threat?
…What's going on?
…I don't get it…

But, this problem couldn't be solved with a few questioning lines. First, I have to check under the bed like the letter said! When I hastily did so, there was nothing there. To tell you the truth, I don't even remember ever storing old notebooks under there, but if I really did and all of my past memories of Matsuda-kun were stolen, it's terrible! It means all I have left is this current notebook I hold in my hand.

…That's all I have left? Just one measly notebook?
…That's what more than 15 years of memories amount to?

Suddenly, a strange feeling descended upon me. Is that what they call a feeling of loss? Until now, that kind of feeling was unfamiliar to the forgetful me. I'm sure people who learn to live with a small wound have to always endure a certain amount of pain, but that wasn't the case for me. I had no idea how to deal with this new pain I currently felt.

For the time being, I was simply angry.

"Who… Whose idea of a prank is this…?"

My voice was strained and shaky, my fists grasping the letter, crumbling it.

"W…What…? Why…?"

I let my thoughts be led by the anger – perhaps, this is the work of some sleazeball scheming to get between me and Matsuda-kun's love. I think Matsuda-kun is very handsome and looks cool, so many girls must be after him! For such girls, the growing love between us must be an eyesore, so one of them must have succumbed to desperate measures. She took my memories hostage, and is probably going to do something to me once I answer her call. Oh, she's such a mean woman! My anger reached its boiling point and was about to erupt like Mt. Etna – but it didn't.

"Hmmm…"

It appears that I have even forgotten how to be properly angry.

But, that was just natural. Someone as uninvolved with the world as I am is a stranger to feelings of anger. Therefore, I had no idea how to funnel it. I guess anger that originates in the imagination alone has its limits. In any case, since I couldn't let my anger out, my feelings rapidly cooled down.

"I guess I'll just do as the letter asks and think about it later."

Having completely cooled down, I lay down on the bed and waited for 1AM, the appointed time. I read the letter over and over so I wouldn't forget what I was waiting for. And then, as the time approached…

"…But, this won't turn into a fight, right? It's going to be okay, isn't it?", harboring these depressing thoughts, I left my room.

"Um… It was the central plaza, right?"

I walked down the pavement with heavy steps, checking the map in "Ryouko Otonashi's Memory Notebook".

The world at night. Everyone was asleep. Tonight, I was the only person walking about. I could sense not a single other human being in the area. I did sense the presence of things which were not human, but I should probably not think too deeply about that. To tell you the truth, the thought of just going back to my room crossed my mind several times, but leaving my memories stolen did not appeal to me, so my feet reluctantly pushed me forward.

After walking for a short while, an iron fence came into view. It was set up to completely block the road I was walking along. According to my notebook, entry to the central plaza was forbidden between 10PM and 7AM, and that's probably why this fence is here. In other words, if I can't overcome this fence, I won't be able to reach my destination. This time, I seriously thought about going back, but at the last moment made a firm resolution and started climbing the fence. A few moments later, I somehow managed to land on the lawn on the other side. I started walking around the central plaza, looking for the fountain I was told to go to.

The darkness deepened. It was probably because this area was thick with trees. The same trees that were usually brilliantly sparkling green under the light of the sun were now painting the plaza pitch black in the starless night. I walked around in darkness for a while, until suddenly my field of vision grew wider. In front of me was a small square. In its center stood a lone street lamp, relatively illuminating its surroundings. Near the lamp, I could see the fountain I was looking for. The water coming out of it made a cute soft splashing sound. As soon as my consciousness understood I have reached my destination, my nervousness increased.

I stepped slowly toward the fountain with excessive caution, but after just a few steps I stopped in my tracks.

I could see someone standing on the other side of the fountain.

I could only see the upper half of their body peeking from the shadows of the trees, but it was pretty clear I was looking at a man's back.

"Um, excuse me…", I boldly raised my voice, but there was no answer.

…I guess I should go just a little bit closer.

Leaves rustled under my feet. Nevertheless, the man didn't make any sign he had noticed the noise. I continued stepping forward and raised my voice again.

"Um… Was it you who called me here?"

Once again, there was no answer.

He… couldn't possibly not have heard me.

My body became heavy. A growing sense of dread pushed down on both my shoulders. In no time my tightly fisted hands were covered in sweat. Nevertheless, the lure of mystery pushed me forward, and the contours of the faint figure in front of me gradually became clearer.

I saw a man wearing a suit. His hair was white and his neck covered with countless deep wrinkles.

Suddenly, a gust of wind came blowing by.

Sway, sway.
Sway, sway.

The man's figure swayed feebly in the wind.

I felt cold shivers all over my body. They felt as if someone touched the back of my neck with an icy hand. I faintly heard a different part of me yelling at me to stop inside my brain, but my feet moved on their own accord as I approached the man and looked at his face.

Our eyes met.

My eyes met the bloodshot red eyeballs bulging out of the man's wide open eyes.

His face was pale, and the dark blood-vessels on it made an eerie pattern. A tongue that looked like a rotting sea slug hanged down from his mouth, reaching the nape of his neck.

He was not standing on the ground.

He was hanging from a rope around his neck.

That rope was now swaying slowly in the wind.

It was a sight that, just by witnessing it, could snatch every bit of heat from your body – but this is not the time to write flowery descriptions in my notebook! I should run away! This has nothing to do with me!

Drip. Drip.

Instead, my eyes dropped to the source of a strange sound. Drops fell from the man's tiptoes and gathered in a small puddle under him.

For some reason there was a notebook lying in the puddle.

The moment I saw it, I felt intense electric currents running through my brain.

On the notebook's front cover, in blurry yet clear letters, was written "Ryouko Otonashi's Memory Notebook."

CHAPTER 6

Before I knew what I was doing, I found myself running, scattering tears and snot all around. While I was running, I wrote my memories down in my notebook.
But, I quickly forgot why I was even running. I slowed my pace, and looked down at the unfinished memory in the notebook. When I did, that recent memory was resurrected in my brain and –

"KYAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

Screaming, I continued fervently dashing away from the central plaza. I climbed over the iron fence like a daredevil, and after running away some more I finally saw the school dormitory ahead of me. I flew into the dorms at top speed, and headed straight to Matsuda-kun's room. As far as I'm concerned, when faced with times like this, the only person I can remember – the only person I can rely on – is Matsuda-kun!

As I ran through the corridors, flipping through my notebook in search of Matsuda-kun's room, I recalled another memory that was written down in it.

"I am not allowed to visit Matsuda-kun in his room without a good reason"

But, I did have a good reason right now. It was an unprecedented state of emergency, and so I ignored the precaution. After flipping through the notebook some more, I finally remembered where Matsuda-kun's room is, and managed to reach it before I forgot again.

Bang bang bang bang bang!

As soon as I reached the door I knocked on it with all my strength and screamed.

"M…Matsuda-kun! I-i-i-i-i-it's terrible! Terrible!"

But, no matter how long I waited, the door didn't show any sign it was going to open.

"M…Matsuda-kun! C'mon, Matsuda-kuuuuuuun!!"

I continued my insistent knocking. I knocked as if I was deranged. As if I was half-crazed. I knocked and knocked, and after I continued knocking for a while, a door finally opened.

"…Honestly, who is this?"

But, the door that opened… was the door to the room next door.

– Wait, huh?

It was strange. There was no one there. The door was open, and I even heard a person's voice, but no one was there.

"Hey, what's goin' on? You're bein' very noisy."

Someone's voice could be heard in the corridor that still looked empty. Even more surprisingly, it was a kid's voice. I looked around once more, but there was still no one there.

"Hey, big sis, where are you lookin'? I'm right here!"

"W…Where are you?", I turned to face the empty hallway and yelled. "W…Where are you hiding?!"

Once again, I could only hear a voice.

"Ha ha, I'm not hidin' anywhere! I'm right here, in front of your eyes! You just haven't noticed me yet."

In front of my eyes?

I took a big breath, and waited for my palpitations, which by now became violent, to calm down. Then, I properly concentrated on the environment. When I did, I finally noticed him.

"Oh, did you finally notice me?"

In front of my eyes stood a boy that looked like a cartoon cupid.

"Ah, don't worry. I was born with a weak sense of presence. No one notices me at first. I'm used to it by now, so don't

let it bother you."

The boy had the clean voice of someone yet to reach puberty. His face was surprisingly featureless. It was the kind of face that you'd draw if told to draw a child's face without using a photo as reference. Its complete lack of distinguishing features was an astounding distinguishing feature all by itself.

"So, what's wrong?"

"……Eh? What's wrong about what?"

"Hey, hey. When you're assaultin' someone's door in the middle of the night, you can't go asking 'about what?'. At this time of night, even insomniacs doze off!"

He held a paper bag crammed with sweet pastries in his hand, fit for the unending appetite of someone still in his growth period. A logo reading "Hansel & Gretel" was printed on it. It must be the bakery's name. He took a pastry out of the bag, crammed it in his mouth, and said,

"Fwehh, fwhaa's whron?"

"…Eh? Can you repeat that?"

The boy swallowed the pastry he's been chewing, and repeated, "Well, what's wrong? How 'bout you tell me about it? I may be able to help."

As he spoke these powerful words, the boy looked me over as if appraising me. His eyes especially lingered on my chest and my legs.

"Um, before that I have one question of my own… what is such a young boy doing here? Are you visiting your brother or your sister here at the scho–"

"My name is Yuuta Kamishiro, and I'm a student in Hope's Peak Academy's 77th class. Pleased to meet 'ya."

"……Huh?"

"I may not look like one, but I am a high-school student."

Oh, my!

"Don't worry, I already have hair growing in all the right places!"

Oh, oh my!

"…Don't just stand there forever with that surprised look on your face! I introduced myself, so can you at least tell me your name, big sis?"

"S…Sure, um…"

I spread my notebook's front page in front of the boy's eyes.

"Huh. That's a strange way to introduce oneself", opined the boy from the other side of the notebook. "Hmm, Ryouko

Otonashi-chan… Not a bad name, if I may say so myself. If I were you I would look forward for chances to introduce myself."

He smiled an innocent smile. When all is said and done, I couldn't see anything but an elementary school student.

"Well, then."

Suddenly, his expression matured.

"So, what kind of trouble have you gotten yourself involved in?"

His eyes glittered with curiosity. No, they glared. And it wasn't just curiosity. They radiated something much more greedy, much more calculating, much more insane.

"Your state of confusion means it's a fairly major trouble, isn't it?"

Staring at me with eyes filled with enthusiasm that didn't fit the rest of his youthful features, he thrusted his hand into the paper bag once again, and chose another pastry.

"Yay! Ebisu pumpkin melon-pan!"

His face was covered with an innocent wide grin once again as he happily pushed the new pastry into his mouth.

"Well, so what is it? What kind of trouble?"

"Um… I wouldn't call it 'trouble', exactly… It's just that… I have something to discuss with Matsuda-kun who lives in this room over here…"

"Fhees fhot fwhom"

"Um, I didn't quite get that…"

Kamishiro-kun gulped the pastry down. "Yasuke Matsuda isn't home right now."

"…Isn't home?"

"Yep, he isn't home."

"Whaaaaaaaaaaaat?!"

My sudden scream reverberated through the dorm's empty corridor.

"That's bad! Bad, bad! Why isn't he home when such important things are going on?!"

"You may yell, but that still wouldn't make him be home."

I was in a panic, but Kamishiro-kun just calmly continued chewing on his pastry.

"His neuroticism is very well known among his classmates in the 77th class. There's no way he wouldn't notice someone knocking that hard on his door. I could even hear it from next door, enough to make me come out to see what was

going on."

"B…But, why isn't he home? Where is he?"

"Maybe he's still in his lab? He's always working late into the night."

"Got it! His lab!", I turned around and started to run…

"Hey, wait!"

…But, Kamishiro-kun stopped me.

"Don't tell me you plan to go there? Did you forget? At this time of night, the east quarter is blocked with an iron fence and security sensors. I don't think you can enter."

"…Eh? I can't?"

…In other words, I can't get Matsuda-kun to save me?

"That… can't be…", I was at my wits' end. "That's bad… What am I going to do? This is the biggest crisis in my entire personal history…!"

"Why don't you let me help you, then?", Kamishiro-kun faced me, his face brimming. "I can't leave a troubled woman with such a cute face as yours alone! So, what have you gotten yourself involved with? Tell me everything."

What have I gotten myself into? That's –

"…Huh?"

I mean, that's –

"Um… What was that?"

It seems that while I was at my wits' end, I've forgotten what I was at my wits' end for.

"Um… Wait just one moment.", I hurried up and checked my notebook.

"Ha ha ha. You really don't have to hide anything. If you weren't in great trouble, you wouldn't be smashing that door like you did. You acted just like Kindaichi in the manga when he comes across a dead body!"

Coming across a dead body… just about the same time Kamishiro-kun said those words, I found the same phrase in my notebook. In a second, my spirit was crushed and suffocated, and I stopped breathing.

"Hey, what's wrong? Your face is as white as if you're in an episode of Kaiki Daisakusen."

I was still in shock from my resurrected memory of finding a body, and couldn't breath. In order to escape from being suffocated I whispered one sentence to myself – This has nothing to do with me. I repeated it again and again.

"Nothing to do with me… nothing to do with me… nothing to do with me…"

For me, they were magical words.

Each time I whispered them, the world slowed down a little. Truly magical words.

"That's right… nothing to do with me…"

After repeating the magic words a few more times, I finally managed to calm down. I was just about to close my notebook so I could really forget once and for all what had happened, when my eyes discovered the next memory written in it.

"There was a Ryouko Otonashi Memory Notebook lying on the ground under the body"

I raised my voice in a scream like I never had before.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAH! I FORGOOOOOOOOOOOOOT!"

That notebook, inside that muddy pool! Even if I convince myself this has nothing to do with me, if they find a notebook with my name on it, it would be impossible to convince anyone else! I'm going to be pulled into a stage, surrounded by extras. They're going to expose me in front of a faceless audience and hand me down some cruel punishment! This is bad! My palpitations became violent again.

"W-W-W-W-W-What should I do?"

Everything was breaking down. The world itself was breaking down, starting at my feet. I have to do something about that notebook before it completely collapses!

Spurred by that sense of urgency, I took off at full speed.

"Hey, big sis! Wait!", a voice called from behind my back. "If you're in trouble please let me help!"

"If you want to help, tell Matsuda-kun to look for me when he comes back! Bye-bye!", I yelled without looking back. Then, I ran past the corridor and out of the dorms.

I ran all the way through the south quarter without stopping to catch my breath, and climbed over the iron fence with that same momentum. I proceeded at full speed into the central plaza, still covered by darkness. I ran so fast I didn't even notice my breath was running out. Finally, I reached the fountain once more. I reached it, but –

"……Huh?"

The scene that spread in front of my eyes… was discomforting.

I looked around several times. Yep, this sure is discomforting.

I opened my notebook to check my memories again. The one thing I can't trust is my own brain, so when faced with such a discomforting scene, my first thought is to doubt myself, but…

"I came across an old man's dead body near the fountain in the central plaza"

That memory, properly written down in the notebook, convinced me it was not me who was at fault. No, the cause of this discomforting feeling was the scene in front of my eyes.

The scene that was lacking a dead body.

It was strange to find a body here, and now it's strange not to find one. Strangeness upon strangeness – it was unbelievably strange.

Was he really alive?
Did the dead body walk away?

I didn't understand what was going on, so I looked around some more. Soon, I found something near the root of a nearby tree. It was a notebook. On its front page was written, "Ryouko Otonashi's Memory Notebook".

Wait, huh? Why is my notebook here?

Then, as I considered that question and was about to go and pick the notebook up…

"TA-TA-RA-TA-TAAAAAAA!"

I turned around, my body shivering. There was a girl standing behind me.

"Heh heh heh, so we've finally reached this event scene!"

She was striking a pose, her arms folded in front of her body. A girl about my age.

She had flashy makeup on, as if she just jumped straight out of the pages of a fashion magazine. Her blond hair bulged in large, soft puffs. Her stylishly torn top had a stupidly large cleavage, and her embarrassingly short skirt revealed long, slender, white legs.

On first look, she seemed like a normal cute girl. Her eyes alone were a million light years divorced from "normal". Those deep dark eyes were like a bottomless swamp, and it almost seemed even the darkness of the night could easily be swallowed inside them.

The moment I saw those eyes, danger signals started flashing violently inside my brain. Every fiber in my body screamed at me to run away, but at the same time I was captured by the despair-inducing idea that resistance was futile. In the end, I just stood there, transfixed, unable to move.

"…Oh? Why are you ignoring me? Or maybe your default mode is being one of those mute characters?"

She had a smile on her face, but it was the wicked smile of a warrior looking down on a foolish weakling before they crush them.

"Ah! I got it!" - she suddenly raised her voice, and thrust her index finger straight at my forehead. "I know what you're thinking! I know what you've been thinking ever since you saw me with my arms crossed! You've been thinking, 'You know, I haven't crossed my arms in quite a while! It must be my voluptuous bosom that's keeping me from it'! How rude! Women who boast their boobs like that are the worst! By the way, did you know the current world obsession with boobs is nothing more than an illusion born out of no-good games and anime and variety shows? Ah, it's so gross! Totally gross! Do you even know what kind of guys are obsessed with boobs? I'll tell you! You know those airheaded girls who get pampered in their hometowns and then go out to the big city where they're not popular anymore so they end up taking off their clothes for anyone who gives them the time of day? There are those virgin guys obsessed with that kind of girl who are also not the brightest bulbs in the shed and only have their impressive lower bodies going on

for them! They are the ones endlessly obsessed with boobs! Changing the subject for a second, aren't virgins the worst? If it wasn't for the Virgin megastores there would be nothing good about them at all! Even then, that chain got shut down by the economy… and yet, it's still a million times better than actual virgins! ……Um, what was I talking about? Oh, that's right, the economy! We should start with the government policy –"

"Hey, wait a sec – ouch!"

She was obviously saying far too much for someone making her first appearance, so I tried to stop her, but she just pushed her finger even deeper into my forehead, making my efforts ineffective.

"Wait, now I remember! We were talking about boob obsession! Y'know, I hate being pushy, but you should really drop that boob obsession of yours. Dropchez cet Obséssion, if you prefer en Français. If you don't drop it, you're going to get in trouble when you're older. Do you get it? The larger they are the more they sag. Or maybe you're one of them? Do you think you can win against the forces of gravity? Do you have superpowers? Should I expect Magneto to come scouting for you?"

"I said, wait a sec – fugah!"

I tried being insistent, but this time she thrust her fingers straight into my mouth, making my efforts ineffective once more.

"Firenzio por favor! …Wait, that's not it. What was it that you say when you want someone to be quiet? Oh, whatever. In any case, shut up and don't interfere. I really love talking, you see. You should act like a good mute girl and just stay silent. It's my turn now!"

"Fugu… Hafuhefu…"

"Ha ha! I don't understand what you're saying at all!"

Saliva started flowing out of my mouth, running through her finger and dropping in a thin thread into the ground.

She didn't seem to mind at all, though, and instead said, "By the way, what's your name, mute girl?"

"Fugahohe… Fuga –"

"Hey, hey", she tilted her head, looking displeased. "Don't mumble. Say your name properly. If you don't answer within 3 seconds, I'm going to follow the 3 second rule and pull your tongue out."

She wasn't even done talking before she grabbed my tongue with her fingers. She had tremendous strength, and my tongue was held firmly in place as if gripped with a vice.

"Right! One! –"

She started the countdown – wait, this isn't a joke?! Every pore in my body suddenly opened, making me sweat profusely.

– Wait, if my tongue is held down I can't speak!

"Two! –"

Suddenly, I noticed the notebook I held in my hand. I pushed it out in front of her eyes with great excitement.

"Hmmm? Ryouko Otonashi, is it? But, I'm very sorry!", she opened her mouth widely and flashed a demonic smile at me. "I told you to say your name, I never said anything about showing it to me!"

"……Hegah?!"

"Right, then. Your three seconds are over, so I'll be taking your tongue now!"

"Ha…… Hagaaaaaafuguuuuuuu!!"

I tried resisting with every bit of strength left in my body, but her nails cruelly wedged into my tongue. Inside my mouth, the irony taste of blood mixed with that of my saliva, and rapidly drained away my fighting spirit. Her eyes, transfixed on mine, were overflowing with dark despair that seemed to squeeze what hope I had left straight out of me. At that moment, I finally came to accept that resistance was useless.

The last of my strength left my body, and my notebook slipped away from my hand. I let my body hang, and abandoned hope.

"…….Heh"

Suddenly, I heard a laughing voice.

"Heh… Aha… Ahahaha!". With an ecstatic expression on her face, her cheeks painted red, she laughed a bizarre, mad, overwhelming laugh.

"AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

When that merciless, savage roar of laughter came to a stop, she finally removed her fingers from my mouth.

"Cough, cough! Cough!"

I coughed madly, spit mixed with blood spewing out of my mouth.

"Ha ha! LOL! Super-awesome! By the way, who'd ever want your tongue, anyway? What do you think I am, some kind of savage?"

"…Cough cough cough!"

"I bet you're wondering why I'd do such an odd thing, don't you? Well, to answer simply, I really wanted to see your face full of despair. Y'see, for me, this is the best kind of introduction you can give!"

I was still leaning forward, gasping for breath. She wiped her saliva-drenched hands on my back, and continued talking.

"By the way, I haven't introduced myself yet, have I?"

I became even more nervous. I had a bad feeling about this. A very bad feeling. My intuition was telling me to stay far away from this girl. But, she didn't stop. Instead, she proudly announced her name.

"My name is Laputa Tenkujo!"

"Laputa… Tenkuj –"

"Just kidding! It's a joke, you see, a joke!"

Is this really the time for jokes?

"Ah! I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, 'is this really the time for jokes?', aren't you?"

It was like she could read my mind.

"Jokes are amazing, aren't they? It was Hirobumi Itou who said, 'only a man who has a sense of humor can live in this world without growing mad', you know. No, that was a lie. Hirobumi-chan never said that!"

I couldn't think how to reply to that. Instead, I just waited for her to finally tell me her name. For real, this time.

"My name is Junko Enoshima. Under the guise of "Super High-school Level Fashion Girl", I'm sometimes a charismatic amateur model for fashion magazines. At other times, I'm a charismatic – oh, oh, oh, but that's still a secret! I'm sorry!"

She stood in the light of the street lamp, stretching her figure like an actress under the spotlight.

Junko Enoshima.

My brain understood that I shouldn't get involved with her, but my body acted on its own. Before I knew it, I picked up my notebook and wrote her name in it.

"……Oh? And what's that you're doing?", Enoshima-san asked with a curious look on her face.

"Ah, um… That's…", I hesitated, not sure what I should say.

"Oh, c'mon! Don't tell me you're going to turn into mute-girl again and keep it a secret?!". She puffed her cheeks as if she was a little girl trying to show her dissatisfaction. I couldn't help but admire how effortlessly her face moved from one expression to the next.

"Mute characters have grown out of fashion, you know? Besides, conversation is an excellent communication tool for us humans, so not using it is kind of a waste, don't you think?"

"T…This isn't a conversion! You've just been spouting nonsense ever since –"

"You should address me by my proper name. Haven't I just introduced myself?", she chided me in a flat, threatening tone.

"Um… Enoshima-san, everything you're saying is just nonse –"

"I don't need the -san. I hate that kind of reserved politeness".

"But, I just met you a few minutes ago…"

"Which makes us complete strangers? Ha ha, you're totally wrong! I mean, we're penpals, aren't we?!"

"…Penpals?"

"You've read my letter, didn't you? Isn't that why you're here?"

A letter? What letter is she talking about? I quickly checked my notebook, and soon remembered. And then, as soon as I did, I raised my voice in surprise.

"Eh? So, it was you who –?!"

"Yep! I'm the beautiful kidnapper who took your memories hostage, ha ha!"

Without showing any signs of embarrassment, but also not of putting on air, she ended her sentence with strange little laugh.

"B…But, why…?"

"Hey, you can't just keep asking questions! Think for yourself!"

"U…Um, so I guess you really wanted to keep me and Matsuda-kun…"

"That has nothing to do with it!"

Even though I did my best to think of a reason, she rejected it in one swift threatening motion.

"Well, whatever. I just don't feel like telling you yet!". As she was speaking, Enoshima-san picked up the notebook that was still lying on the ground under a tree, ignored the liquid it was soaked in and shoved it into her cleavage.

"Heh heh heh. I'm sorry but I can't return that to you yet. This event scene can't proceed that far hey hey hey hey hey hey" - Enoshima-san suddenly opened her eyes wide in surprise. "Huh? Huh? Huh? Huh? Huh?", she turned her head from side to side, calling out as if she was mad. "It's gone. Gone. Gone. Gone. Gone. Gone!"

"W…What's gone?", I asked timidly, confused by her sudden change.

"It's gone! Gone! Isn't that strange? Why is it gone? Why?!", she paced around the circumference of the trees, repeating her cries like a broken record.

"I asked, what's gone?!", I finally decided to use a stronger tone, and then –

"Oh? Ah…".

She finally turned her face back toward me… but it was an unexpected expressionless face. Then, she replied in a voice lacking any intonation, speaking as lightly as if she was discussing trivialities.

"The body. The body is gone. The body that was here isn't here anymore."

"Huh?"

"Oh, have you forgotten already? Honestly, even forgetfulness should have its limits. You saw that body yourself, didn't you?"

A new question came into my head. "…Wait, how did you know I'm forgetful? Have I told you?"

"T…That doesn't matter! Anyway, there was definitely a body here before!", Enoshima-san raised her voice, brushing my question aside. "Please, believe me! There was a body here minutes ago! I killed him, so I'm sure of it!"

"……Huh?"

Before I knew it, my body stiffened.

"You see, I came at him from behind and hanged him in one go! I did it with those very slender arms! Then, he leaked a little. Honestly, old men like him should wear diapers, just in case. If they did, it would give me peace of mind even in days like this!"

"Huh?"

I felt as if a spell of confusion was cast on me. Enoshima-san, on the other hand, went on, gesticulating enthusiastically as she spoke.

"Tee-hee. To be frank, some of it got on my skirt, so I went to the bathroom to wash it off. But it seems in the time I was gone the body took off! It slipped away! Well, it's my fault, really, getting scared from a little pee like that. That's why, as punishment, I put that pee-drenched notebook under my shirt just now!"

"Huh?"

"I mean, I worked so hard so I could make an example out of him… Honestly, who could have done that?!"

"Huh?"

"Hey, you've been doing that for a while now. Are you trying to be one of those absent-minded characters that are always so popular?"

"Huh?"

"Or maybe you're just a dummy?"

It was useless.

Thoughts I couldn't even form into words ran around inside my head, causing a terrible, grating headache. I didn't understand a thing. Is killing a person a thing someone can confess so readily?

"Ah, are you wondering how come I've confessed such a thing to you so readily?", she hit the bullseye once more. "That should be obvious! I want you involved in this!"

"……Eh?"

A vague yet extraordinary anxiety unfolded over my entire body.

"M…Me, involved in this…? W…Wait a second! Why do I have to get involved in such a horrible thing!"

"Huh?"

"I'm asking… why do I have to get involved in such a horrible thing?!"

"Huh?"

"I…I said –"

"Don't get so mad! You're ruining your absent-minded character personality!"

"That's not it! I –"

"In that case, let me ask you a question. Say you're making instant ramen. You put boiling water in and then wait 3 minutes, right? But if someone comes and asks you 'how come it's 3 minutes?', what's going to be your answer? You can't answer that, can you?"

My thoughts reached a state of unprecedented turmoil.

"W…What are you talking about?! Don't change the –"

"I'm not changing the subject! It's just the same!", Enoshima-san counterattacked with a strong tone of voice. "That's just how things are, so that's why I'm doing it! There's no further explanation! Ah, but, y'know, I'm not proud of it but I am an impatient person, so I often give up before the three minutes are up. People think I have a thing for hard noodles, but it's actually because of this muuuuch deeper reason! Well, do you get it now?"

My cognition clattered and collapsed, and the inside of my brain completely turned into rubble. All that was left was a large number of question marks.

I don't understand anything. That was the one and only answer I was certain of.

Attempting to understand other people perfectly is a futile activity unless you're aiming for the Ubermensch olympics. I know that. But, nevertheless, her case was extraordinary. I shouldn't have gotten involved with her from the very beginning, after all. But, it's probably not too late yet! Before I get even more involved –

That's right, I should run away!

That's right, I should run away!

Having finally arrived at this simple answer, I promptly turned the other way, kicked powerfully at the ground, and set off dashing away from danger.

Almost immediately, I found myself colliding head-on with Enoshima-san.

"How – ?!"

I fell down right on my butt. It hit the ground so harshly that my entire body turned numb. When I looked up, Enoshima-san stood on the road, blocking my head. I never even saw her move, and yet she somehow appeared behind me before I even started running.

"T…Teleportation?!"

"I prefer 'shukuchi-jutsu'. I like the pop-culture vibe."

I felt like it wasn't just my butt that hit the ground, but rather my anything and everything. It seemed I couldn't escape her after all. I may have convinced myself I have nothing to do with it, but she will not allow that.

"I think you misunderstand the situation, don't you agree?" Enoshima-san crouched down and peered into my exhausted eyes. Alarms went off everywhere inside my head – I mustn't look into her eyes. Nevertheless, I couldn't avert my gaze. "I should've let you known ahead. Your intentions are irrelevant. What's relevant is Junko Enoshima's purposes. That is all. That's why even thinking about escaping from Junko Enoshima is nonsense. The world itself is Junko Enoshima's playground, and everyone in it is merely living in it on borrowed time. I'm not talking 'everything you own is mine' – I'm talking, 'you yourself are mine'. The entire world and all mankind are for Junko Enoshima to do with as she pleases."

– What?

It was the most evil, extraordinary, egotistical doctrine. The kind that causes you to feel sick. If she really means all that, I have to resent my own lack of luck for meeting that girl.

"Oh, well. We should return to what we were talking about. The issue of the dead body." She stood up, recollecting herself, turned to face me and asked a question. "By the way, do you know what Hope's Peak Academy's Steering Committee is?"

"…Hope's Peak Academy's Steering Committee?" Just to make sure, I checked my notebook, but I couldn't find mention of that phrase anywhere. It seems I honestly do not know what that is. But, if she mentions that name right now, that probably means –

"Ah, it seems you breached a conclusion! Ah, sorry. I keep messing up my pronunciation. Let me try again. It seems you've reached a conclusion!"

Enoshima-san spread both her hands grandiosely, as if she was the master-of-ceremonies of an extravagant show.

"Bin-bingo! That's right! The dead body that was supposed to be here was a member of Hope's Peak Academy's Steering Committee. These guys are much higher ranked than the teaching staff and even the headmaster. That is, they're the geezers who hold the real power in this school. Hee hee hee, aren't you excited already?" Growing excited all by herself, she continued. "But, there's no need to grieve. I mean, him getting killed here is just the way things are meant to be. Yep, it was set up since the very beginning. That's why no matter how much they try to hide that incident, it's all useless!"

"……That incident?" I asked without thinking. It was a momentary response I can only call thoughtless. The moment it came out of my mouth, I was bewildered by the fact I even asked it.

"Oh? Oh? Oh? Curious, are you? Of course you are - one can only listen to such a vague name like 'that incident' so many times before curiosity takes over, don't you agree?" Saying that, Enoshima-san struck a pose, her hands on both sides of her waist and her chest puffed high, and declared loudly, "The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History! That is the true identity of that incident I was talking about!"

The moment I heard those words I was assaulted by a sensation as if some kind of strange fever invaded the inside of my skull. What –? My consciousness went number and number with the scorching heat. At the same time, I absentmindedly wrote those words in my notebook, as if someone was manipulating my hand. "The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History".

"Yep, write down everything you hear. That's a good girl," Enoshima-san laughed in satisfaction when she saw me do so. "Y'know, you'd make an excellent part-time worker. There's no manager out there who doesn't tell new workers on their first day to write down everything they're taught. But, if someone tried to order me to do something like that, I'd send them straight to hell. I'm not kidding – straight to hell. First, I'd finish off their family, then their friends and acquaintances, and then, when they're fully immersed in despair, I'll wait until they come ask me themselves to please kill them… By the way, who are you?"

"Eh?" I looked up from my notebook in surprise, and saw that the scowl in her eyes increased considerably. Her scathing eyes were looking towards something far behind my back. I turned over at once, but could see nothing but deep black trees in the middle of the night's darkness.

Nevertheless, Enoshima-san faced the darkness and asked again in a sullen voice, "Hey, I asked you who you are."

Suddenly, I saw something moving from the corner of my eyes. Then, something swayed up slowly from behind the dense foliage.

"Eh?"

A white mask appeared inside the jet-black scenery. It was a human face. Its whiteness was as pure as if it was covered in white paint.

"Sigh, I guess I've been found out."

Along with the voice, a man's silhouette became apparent within the darkness. He had a long, slender body, much like a snake stretching upwards. He wore a pitch-black school uniform, and had pitch-black hair dropping down to his shoulders. Black upon black. The white face peeking from the blackness had small, thin, lizard-like eyes carved into it.

"My name… is Isshiki Madarai." I could hardly see his mouth move.

"Is that so? It's not like it really matters, but… that's such a lame name! 'Junko Enoshima' is ten billion times cooler!"

I took a sidelong glance at Enoshima-san, being her usual loud self behind me. She didn't seem much affected by the situation, and flashed her regular overconfident smile.

"That is, indeed, troubling. I have much pride in my name… By the way, that is not the only thing troubling me at present."

"Huh. I wonder what else there could be?"

"I was hoping to talk to you when you're alone, but… well… If it's come to this, I guess I have no choice."

Madarai took something out of his pocket while he was murmuring. It looked like a photo. He moved his lizard-like eyes back and forth between us and the photo. "……I see. So you're Junko Enoshima."

"And what is your business with Junko Enoshima?" she answered without even blinking.

"I have heard a certain rumor."

"Was it about how Junko Enoshima is transcendently, hopelessly beautiful?"

"There's that, I guess, but…" Madarai paused for a second, and then continued in a completely different tone of voice. "I also heard that Junko Enoshima was involved in that incident."

"And that's what you want to talk about? Ha ha, I'm sorry, that's impossible!" Enoshima-san wasn't even slightly unnerved, nor did she lose her smile. "That's not something a small fry like you has any right to talk about. Know your place!"

"…I thought you'd say that. Well, I guess I won't get what I want that easily."

"And what are you gonna do about it? Are you going to force it out violently? Are you an old-fashioned kind of guy? That kind of trite development should stay inside V-Cinema films!"

"…Speaking of being old-fashioned, I am not the type who'd go easy on you just because you're a woman. I hope that's not what you're counting on." Madarai's coercive glare shot through us.

Enoshima-san and Madarai glared at each other in a way that almost made the ground itself shake…… But this has nothing to do with me, does it? This is an issue between that boy who called himself Isshiki Madarai and that girl who called herself Junko Enoshima – I'm not involved at all, so it's okay for my body to stop shaking with fear now, right?

"Well, then. I hope you two are ready, because –"

"W…Wait a second!" I raised my shaky voice. Both Enoshima-san and Madarai turned their eyes towards me at the same time. "Ah. U…Um, it's strange that you said 'you two' just now. After all, you only have business with –"

"I can't have one of you running away. Anyone involved with Junko Enoshima is likely to have something to do with the incident themselves," said Madarai, licking his lips. "Well, if you need someone to blame, blame yourself for getting involved with Junko Enoshima. Furthermore, I've been hearing nothing but complaints, but don't you think this is a pain for me too? I came prepared for one and now I have to deal with two. That's twice the labour. But, you don't see me complaining, so why don't you just keep it to yourself?"

"W…What…?" That was some messed-up reasoning. No, it wasn't even close to being reasoning at all. It was just overwhelmingly egotistical. But… I guess still not as egotistical as she was.

"Hmmm. I see, I see. You're brimming with deadly motivation, are you? But, y'see… this girl here is overflowing with deadliness!" said Enoshima-san, stroking my head.

– Wait, what girl is she talking about?!

"Hey, don't look so stupified! I'm leaving the rest to you!"

– Huh? Leaving the rest of what to who?

"Ah! Your face looks just like a fur seal's! …But that doesn't matter now - go ahead and fight him already! That's your role here, y'know."

– M…Me, fighting…?!

"W-W-W-W-What are you talking about?!" I screamed, brushing her hand off the top of my head.

"Oh, it's fine. You're a girl who can do anything when you want to. You can even kill when you want to, y'know."

"Hey. Enough with that kind of talk. 'Killing'… That's not a word fit for healthy high-school girls.", Madarai's face became distorted with a sarcastic smile.

"Oh? Not a fan of mutual killing?" Enoshima-san scoffed. "Huh. You're not prepared at all! I'm a little disappointed."

"…That's just natural. What use are you to me dead? There are many things I seek answers to, after all. At the very least, I have to keep your mouths working." Madarai narrowed his lizard eyes even more, and repeated, emphasizing his words. "But just the mouths." Then, his slender body swayed like the flame of a candle, and started moving slowly towards us.

"Hm. I guess he really is eager."

"Of course I am. I've been waiting for this chance ever since the incident." Madarai pushed out a tightly gripped fist in front of his chest. It was rugged like a turban snail and didn't match his snake-like body at all. Should someone be hit with that fist, their face would probably cave in, just like in comic books.

"W-W-W-W-What are we going to do…?" Tears started streaming from my eyes.

"I guess we have no choice after all," Enoshima-san whispered in a low, stiff tone. Then, she suddenly changed back to her regular clear, cheerful voice. "Go ahead!"

"W… W-W-W-W-W-WAIIIIIIIIIIT!"

"Ahahaha! Don't worry! You're going to be just fine!" Enoshima-san gripped my shoulders like a bully would. "I'm going to help you, of course. We'll have you display the full extent of your talent in no time!"

Huh? Talent? My talent?

"Hey, hey - when you're in trouble, look in your notebook, remember?"

"Ah, yeah…" I turned my eyes down to my notebook following Enoshima-san's urges, and then –

SMASH!

FWOOOOSH! CRACK!

WHOOP! SWISH! TATATATATA!

Sound effects that should belong in a cartoon reverberated through the area. I looked back up in a conditioned reflex, and –

"……Eh?"

Enoshima-san, who was just behind me a second ago, was now a few meters ahead, exchanging violent blows in a fierce battle with Madarai.

FWASH! ZUBABA! DODODODO!

Madarai used his long limbs like whips as he attacked. His opponent, fashion girl Enoshima-san, was standing her ground. Where the heck did this fighting action come from?!

"Hey! Don't just stand there looking like a pig in shock!" Enoshima-san yelled at me while performing magnificent tripping techniques as if she was a professional gymnast. "Write everything down in your notebook!" Right then, she delivered a perfect kick, sending Madarai down into the lawn with a short grunt. Nevertheless, he turned his long body like a spinning top, and recovered from his fall still spinning, as if he was breakdancing.

"Whoops!" Enoshima-san jumped and dodged, and Madarai took advantage of the opening to rise back up. Then, without waiting a single second he delivered a straight right. He was clearly too far away for the strike to hit, but his bizarre long arms seemed to ignore the distance. Nevertheless, Enoshima-san dodged his flying fist, and in the same movement stepped up and thrust the tip of her right foot into his abdomen.

"Gufuu – !" A groan left Madarai's mouth. The two finally stopped moving.

"Oh, it worked! The Crescent Moon Kick. I wanted to try it ever since I read about it in a magazine." Enoshima-san didn't pursue the crouched Madarai, and instead boasted while grinning broadly.

By the way, what even caused this school battle to begin? Am I just forgetting again, or was it really just completely incoherent –

"Hey, I told you not to just stand there looking bewildered!" I was still frozen in place, and Enoshima-san's irritated voice washed over me. "Write everything down in your notebook! What do you think I'm working so hard for –"

Suddenly, her face flew away. A high-kick as swift as a whip came at her from behind, sending her thin body flying like a scrap of paper.

"Ah!" I raised my voice instinctively, and turned my eyes to where her body was headed.

"……Sigh, that was almost dangerous." She was posed on her knees, but then stood up as if nothing had happened. There was no visible damage except for a red mark on her left arm. It seemed she tried to use that arm to guard against Madarai's kick. I wasn't the only one who thought such a blow should've broken her thin arms, though - I could see signs of impatience on Madarai's scowling face.

"Ha! Nervous 'cause I'm too strong? Starting to doubt yourself? That's right! I'm the ultimate weapon fashion-girl who hasn't lost in over 300 fights!"

"Shut up." Brushing away her words in anger, Madarai rushed at her once more. Soon, the battle resumed in full force. They both used their right hands, right feet, left hands, left feet, and then their full bodies in a hectic exchange of blows. I simply stood watching, unable to move. Only my hand moved, to write everything down earnestly in my notebook.

Enoshima-san let out a series of exaggerated high-kicks, as though in response to the one that sent her flying before, but Madarai just twisted his mouth into a grin. He carefully avoided the kicks, and then, with perfect timing, lowered his posture and sprang into a tackle. His long hands stretched forward, and were trying to take hold of Enoshima-san's waist, but –

Enoshima-san's knee sprung up aiming directly for Madarai's jaw.

"Ku…!"

Madarai managed to turn away from his tackling target at the last second, and avoided Enoshima-san's knee by mere millimeters. Nevertheless, he lost his balance and thrust his right hand towards the ground. As soon as he did, Enoshima-san cried, "Hi-yaaaaa!" in a silly voice and delivered a spinning kick at the right half of his body, which had become an open target. Madarai guarded with his left hand in panic – but he didn't make it in time. His right temple was hit with Enoshima-san's intense kick. His slender body flew down towards the ground, swaying back and forth.

"Ah, that was an easy win! Easier than goin' dancing!" Enoshima-san laughed loudly. "I guess he was all boasty without much to show for it. He should try going back and relearning the basics – that was really no trouble at all!" She continued to cackle, and then took out a hand mirror from an inside pocket and started resetting her messy hair. Surprisingly, despite the fierce battle she just participated in, she wasn't even out of breath.

I rushed over to her side, and started cheering. "T…Thank god! Thank god! For a second there I was really worried!"

Enoshima-san's expression changed in an instant. "Huh?" She gave me the ultimate despising look. "…I think you're misunderstanding the situation. You don't think this is settled yet, do you? I mean, that would be an armageddon-level misunderstanding!"

"Eh…?"

Suddenly, I caught a shape slowly rising up from the corner of my eye. It was Madarai.

"H…How?"

"It's obvious, isn't it? That kind of kick shouldn't have sent him flying as grandiosely as he did. He did just what I did before - he let himself fly. Y'know, in order to reduce damage. Well, it's all because I went a little easy on him, you know – he wouldn't have survived otherwise."

SKKKKRRRRRRREEEEEEEEEE

I heard the unpleasant sound of grinding metal. It came from Madarai's teeth, which were grinding together so much it almost seemed sparks were going to come out of them.

"H…He's mad, isn't he…? I…I think he's mad…"

My face was fixed on Madarai as I turned my nervous voice towards Enoshima-san, who stood hidden behind me.

"It's fine. It's impossible for someone like you to be taken down by someone on his level… Probably."

"At least be definitive about it!", I was just about to turn and face her when –

"Never take your eyes off", Enoshima-san commanded with a sharp voice. "Never take your eyes off the prey. That's the basics of the basics."

"P…Prey…?"

But, I'm the one who's the prey here, aren't I? Madarai kept grinding his teeth, advancing slowly towards us. I was shaking in fear like a frightened rabbit in front of a bloodthirsty poisonous serpent. There was nothing I could do but turn to rely on Enoshima-san once more –

"What?" Madarai suddenly opened his eyes wide in surprise. "W…When did she –?"

When did she… what? A bad feeling came over my entire body, and I turned around in fear to look behind me.

"……"

Um, what was it she called that? I went over my notebook, and soon remembered. Right, right.

"…Shukuchi-jutsu, huh."

There was no one behind me anymore. In no time at all, no sign that Enoshima-san was ever there remained.

"It seems you've been abandoned…" I heard a man's voice from behind me. I turned around once more. Madarai was suddenly standing right before of my eyes, looking down at me with vicious eyes. "But, there is no need to resent anyone. I shall settle things properly with her later. It is just the order that changed."

Having been handed what sounded like a death sentence, I came to realise the fundamental error that occupied my thoughts until that moment. I was an idiot for thinking I could rely on Enoshima-san. But, this is no time for complaints! I have to do something!

Then, as my faltering eyes turned down to my notebook, I heard Madarai's voice from above.

"…Huh. You must be really confident if you're reading a notebook at a time like this."

"U…Um, excuse me…" I couldn't even bring my head up again. I couldn't even grasp the content of what I was reading, but I still flipped through the pages. I couldn't find a breakthrough solution to my problems, but I did my best to come up with an excuse to give me some time.

"W…Wait one second… You said you were investigating The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History, didn't you? I…In that case I won't be much help to you at all. I mean, I know absolutely nothing about that –"

"How did you know that, then?" Madarai's voice turned to ice and made me shiver even more.

"K…Know what?"

"All I said before was that I was looking into 'that incident'. Nevertheless, you seem to know I was talking about The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History." I looked up. The sharpness in Madarai's eyes seemed to grow tenfold. My first thought was to escape those eyes, so I looked down at my notebook again.

"U…Um, you see, that's… I… I just heard that name recently by accident. Yes… that's definitely what happened…"

"There are not many people in this academy who even know about that incident or its title. The fact that you two spoke about it… it seems my suspicions were exactly right."

I didn't need to even look anymore. I could imagine Madarai's lizard eyes twisting towards me in laughter. Shivers went down my spine. My arms and legs stiffened. I couldn't move at all.

– It's over.

I can't be sure about it, but this is probably the first time in my life I was conscious of my own mortality. Of course, at times like this there's just one thing that comes to my empty head.

– Matsuda-kun.

Yes, my beloved Matsuda-kun. But, of course, the memories don't come flashing inside my head like a revolving lantern. All I can remember is my feelings towards him. Therefore, I whispered his name again and again inside my heart. I had to remember…

Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun…

– Huh?

Um, let's try that again.

Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun… Matsuda-kun……

– H…Huh……?

That's strange. Something isn't right.

"I can't… remember…?"

Suddenly, my entire body was abuzz. I was assaulted by an unprecedented sense of fear and loneliness when I realized I couldn't remember Matsuda-kun.

– Is this what loss feels like?

It was a hellish feeling like I never felt before. A terrible feeling, as if parts of my body were bitten off by evil demons.

"What is it? Your face is terribly pale."

"……Eh?" The second I looked back up at Madarai, I understood what was happening. The fear the man in front of my eyes cast over me took control over all my emotions. That's why I couldn't remember my feelings for Matsuda-kun.

"Your face looks like the face of someone who is about to be attacked." He cackled at his own unfunny joke.

– Matsuda-kun Matsuda-kun.

Even swallowed by fear, I continued whispering his name inside my heart. My emotions did not respond. Nevertheless, I continued to whisper frantically. It was almost like a prayer.

– I want to see Matsuda-kun's face. I want to hear Matsuda-kun's voice. I want to smell Matsuda-kun. I want to touch Matsuda-kun. I want to meet Matsuda-kun. I want to meet Matsuda-kun. I want to meet Matsuda-kun.

Suddenly, something changed.

My heart beat loudly, and my blood, which had until now been circulating nowhere in particular, began to flow into my limbs again. A surprising sense of heat melted the fear that was keeping my body frozen.

– I want to meet Matsuda-kun.

I repeated the mantra several more times, and soon completely forgot the fear that was controlling my feelings.

– I want to meet Matsuda-kun! I want to meet Matsuda-kun! I want to meet Matsuda-kun!

"I want to… meet Matsuda-kun……"

"……Hm?"

Madarai perceived the change in me and put some distance between us immediately. It seems that despite his looks, he was a cautious man… and that I reclaimed my composure enough to make that analysis. With that newfound composure I turned back to read my notebook once again, from the beginning. All of a sudden, my eyes stopped on the very first page.

There was an explanation regarding my talent written there.

It's strange that I never noticed it until now. It must be the power of love Matsuda-kun granted me!

– I'm going to meet Matsuda-kun! I'm going to meet Matsuda-kun! I'm going to meet Matsuda-kun!

It was no longer just my heart's desire. It was now my clear goal, birthing a rekindled fever inside me.

"……Please step away," I declared to Madarai, raising my head from the notebook, "I'm going to meet Matsuda-kun!"

"Who the hell is that? Never mind that, what made you come back to life so suddenly?"

"Love, of course!" I yelled in triumph. "My power of love for Matsuda-kun!" I yelled unabashedly.

"I… agree that love is not something to be trifled with… It urges people to take unimaginable actions, and sometimes drives them to madness… although I'm not sure that's what's happening here."

"…In any case, don't stand in my way!" I scowled fiercely at Madarai.

"Or maybe, it's desperation that's driving you now? That would be a bother. You can never know what desperate people are going to do. It doesn't matter if they're weak or strong, it's always a bother."

"Shut up and move, already!"

"You're… truly a strange woman."

He lowered his center of weight, and crouched into a low posture. He must be attempting to preempt any possible attack. But –

It has nothing to do with me.

Something like that cannot hope to extinguish the red flame burning inside me!

– I'm going to meet Matsuda-kun! I'm going to meet Matsuda-kun! I'm going to meet Matsuda-kun!

I defenselessly stepped forward in determination, my hand still holding the open notebook. In reaction, Madarai lowered his center of gravity even more, and prepared a clenched fist next to his lower back. He was ready for war. Nevertheless,

it didn't seem like he was going to make the first move. He was extremely alert. I was right - he really does have a cautious personality.

But –

No, because of that –

I stopped right there, and yelled one more declaration.

"Checkmate, Isshiki Madarai!"

"What the hell? That's a lame catchphrase……"

"……Checkmate, Isshiki Madarai!"

I couldn't think of any other catchphrase, so I repeated the same one again. Like a wild animal about to swoop down on its prey, I slowly lowered my own center of gravity. I concentrated my entire body's strength into my two legs, and as soon as it was all accumulated –

– I released it all at once!

I kicked the ground violently using every bit of stored energy, and started running as if my body erupted from an explosion – away from Madarai, who was still on the alert.

"H…Hey!"

I heard Madarai's bewildered voice far behind me. It seemed he was not prepared for this development at all. Running, I opened my notebook to its first page again, and checked the explanation about my talent one more time.

That's right. This is my talent. My one and only way to come out of this situation winning.

I don't remember it, though, so it still doesn't feel quite real.

After a very short while I could hear running footsteps chasing me. I decided to put my predictions to the test. What is the man chasing me thinking right now? I'm pretty sure –

I'm pretty sure he's thinking something like, "now that's truly a strange woman."

CHAPTER 7-8

"Now, that's truly a strange woman," Isshiki Madarai whispered to himself while running.

It wasn't that he wasn't careful. Quite the opposite - that was exactly why he was outsmarted. He couldn't have guessed from her actions that she would run away like this, but, in hindsight, he realized that what she did was only natural.

A cornered mouse will bite the cat, or so the proverb goes. But in reality, it's very rare to find a mouse who would bite a cat. Even when they're seriously injured, can hardly move, and completely cornered, a mouse's first thought is still try to try to escape.

That's just a mouse's true nature.

And that girl who turned heel and escaped is just the same. In other words, it's in her nature to run away.

"…In that case, all I have to do is catch her, and this will be over in no time." His mouth twisted in a cruel smile. His face was that of a hunter, chasing his prey. But his true goal wasn't simple relentless predatism… and that cruel smile was perhaps a little excessive.

– I'll catch her, and after giving her a good beating, I'll make her tell me everything about that incident…

The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History –

Madarai hated that incident and everyone involved in it. Right now, getting revenge for the incident was the only thing driving him. It gave him motivation.

He got his chance a few hours ago, when he received a suspicious anonymous message.

Junko Enoshima, who knows the secrets behind the incident, is going to show up in the central plaza.

The possibility of it being a trap had crossed his mind, but he didn't care. Even if it had been a trap, it would have been an opportunity to see who set it up.

– I'm going to get my revenge.

– I must get my revenge - I still have someone who needs protection.

There was a flame burning inside his eyes. The moment he caught sight of his prey, running ahead of him, he increased his own speed dramatically. His long hair flew behind him as he closed the distance between them in an instant. In no time at all, he would be able to reach out his arms and catch her.

– It's over.

He pushed his left foot strongly into the ground, and reached out with his long right arm. He could feel his fingers touching his prey's hair – when something happened.

The prey suddenly changed direction with a sharp turn, almost as if she was slipping through Madarai's hands. Taken by surprise, he lost his balance. She had timed her move perfectly, almost as if she planned it all ahead.

"….Keh!"

Madarai clicked his red tongue loudly, and was soon back on his feet. He turned back towards his prey and started running again, but he quickly noticed something strange. His prey, running ahead of him, was doing something ridiculous.

"…What…the…?"

The prey was was writing something in a notebook as she was running.

"Huh…?"

– Writing while running?

– That's clearly impossible, however you look at it.

He was bewildered. It wasn't just that he couldn't understand why she was doing it – he did not expect his prey to do anything other than simply try to escape.

Isn't she just a mouse, running away from danger?

Could she actually have a plan, beyond escaping?

But, it could also be a bluff. Just like when she first ran away, she might just be taking advantage of his vigilance in order to obtain a chance to escape again.

Well, whatever it was, Madarai didn't have time for hesitation. His desire for revenge for The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History was too intense for him to give up now. He recklessly increased his speed, and was soon within reach of his prey once again.

– This time it's really over.

He reached his right hand toward his prey's blind spot, and grabbed her.

No – all he grabbed was empty air.

Once again, with timing that seemed precisely calculated, his prey suddenly changed course. Madarai, still pulled forward by leftover energy, saw a huge tree emerging from the darkness in front of him. He thrust his arms forward in panic, and the palms of his hands were soon met with the roughness of the tree's bark.

– What the hell is going on?!

Madarai kicked at the ground in anger, and was soon back in full speed. His prey was quickly within reach again, but as he reached his arms to strike her she managed to slip away and escape again.

– I can't catch her?

Even as that realization slowly dawned on Madarai, he couldn't explain it. She wasn't even turning her head to look at him - her eyes were constantly on her notebook. How is she able to avoid his arms, coming at her from behind her back? She wasn't even avoiding him clumsily - she did it with perfect timing.

It was almost as if she could see what was going on behind her back… No, that can't be right. Her timing was far too perfect for it to be something as simple as that.

– It's like she knows what's going to happen in advance.

"You've got to be kidding…"

Madarai shook off the thought from his head and accelerated to full speed again. Soon, he was at his prey's defenseless back, reaching out his arm once again. The moment he was about to touch her – just as he expected, the prey dodged his hand and escaped. This time, however, Madarai anticipated it, and turned his body sideways to match her movement. He extended both of his long arms and jumped toward the prey. It was a spectacular tackle.

He had her!

…Or so he thought.

"……Wha–?!"

It was as if she knew he was going to anticipate her dodge. She crouched – again, with perfect timing – and passed by Madarai's feet like a turtle, causing him to clumsily twist his body forward and crash violently onto the ground.

Madarai lay on the lawn for a short while, unable to move. He wasn't in pain… but a different kind of damage had been inflicted upon him.

"What… the hell…?"

At long last, he got back on his feet. He shook his long hair from his eyes and searched for his prey. He could see her figure running away, already small in the distance. As he watched his escaping prey, Madarai whispered to himself in an amazed tone.

"…I'm begging you. Please don't tell me she has precognition."

– Precognition?

That's probably what he's thinking right now, but no such thing exists, of course. No, it probably does exist somewhere in this world - at least, I'd like to think dreams sometimes mean something - but there's no way such a hackneyed power would awaken inside me during a dangerous situation… This isn't a comic book, after all.

No, this isn't something as outrageous as precognition –

These are just predictions.

I've been analyzing the things he seemed to think and the actions he took, and predicting the actions he was likely to take next. That's what my notebook taught me my talent is.

Super analytical proficiency.

I've been using my talent, and predicting his next moves by analyzing his behaviour patterns statistically. That's all.

That said, that kind of analysis requires a vast amount of data. Without data, I can't predict anything at all. But, that's exactly what "Ryouko Otonashi's Memory Notebook" is for.

I've been extracting behavior patterns from his speech and actions, and have been exhaustively writing them down as usable data in my notebook. The battle between Madarai and Enoshima-san was a particularly important source of data: she attacked Madarai using a variety of techniques, and possibly even let herself get hit on purpose. Now that I think about it, she was probably trying to show me as many of his attack patterns as she could. I have no idea why someone like Enoshima-san would do something like that for me, but there's no doubt that's exactly why I'm able to predict his current behaviour so perfectly.

Nevertheless, I can't possibly predict everything about him based on just a few minutes' worth of data. It's just that my current goal is simply to predict how he was going to behave in a chase situation – and for that I have more than enough.That's how I knew the timing, angles and techniques he was going to use to try to catch me.

But, my current prediction is that he isn't going to give up just yet.

Right now, he's still perplexed at the skill I have displayed. If my prediction is correct, he's going to realize very soon that the source of my newfound power lies in my notebook. It's likely he's going to chase me much more seriously from now on. If that's the case, there's a limit to how much I can keep running away randomly.

So, what should I do –?

I predict… that the answer will probably come to me soon.

I've been running for a while, relying on the crude map of the central plaza that's drawn in my notebook. Soon, I passed the area overgrown with trees and came to a clearing. Just as I predicted, there was small building there. That was my destination. The moment I saw it, fear and bravery began to intermingle inside my head.

But, I have no choice.

I have to forget any fear and anxiety. I have no choice.

I have no choice if I want to meet Matsuda-kun.

I have to do it. I'm sure I can do it!

By the way, that wasn't a prediction just now. It was just enthusiasm.

CHAPTER 9

Madarai reached a conclusion. There was some kind of secret hiding in that notebook.

Yes, that must be it. There is no such thing as precognition. She's been insistently writing in that notebook of hers despite the fact that terrible things are going to happen to her if she's caught – which means her secret must be in there. Madarai could not imagine what that secret was, but he was certain that there was one.

– Which means, if I snatch it away everything's going to be fine.

Madarai hadn't always been prone to complicated thoughts. He has often been told that contrary to his looks he was a cautious man, but that wasn't a trait he was born with. It was simply necessary for the job he had until recently.

But now… Now, that job was meaningless.

– It was my fault.
– It was because I couldn't protect them.

The only job that mattered now was finding the culprit responsible for The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History, and getting revenge.

"…I can't afford to stand still. Not now." Madarai started running again, and thought about what he had to do next in simple terms.

– Catch my prey. Hurt her. Make her talk.

Now thoroughly serious, Madarai ran with all his power in the direction his prey had fled. He may have lost some time, but it was not yet a fatal loss. Even if she managed to escape, all he had to do was keep chasing her. As long as he didn't give up, it wouldn't be over.

– Catch. Hurt. Talk.

He repeated those three words to himself, slipping through the dark trees like a black snake. He was paying careful attention to his surroundings as he ran, and suddenly, his field of vision expanded. He arrived at a small clearing that looked like a plaza. He surveyed the area, and soon noticed a small prefab shed on the other side of the clearing. Light from a street lamp next to the shed flickered continuously, creating an ominous atmosphere right out of a horror movie.

Suspicious. Very suspicious.

But even so…

"…It would be faster to investigate than to wonder what's going on."

Madarai reduced his speed, and stepped carefully towards the shed. Its cream colored walls and roof would normally seem pleasant – calming, even – but under the flickering light they just seemed eerie. Madarai stood in front of the shed, and started by peeking through the window set in one of the walls. The room in front of his eyes was dusty, matching the flickering light coming from above. It must be used for storage by the custodian of the central plaza. There were shelves packed with fertilizer bags and paint cans, as well as cleaning tools cramped all over the place. He couldn't see anyone inside – but there were a lot of places someone could hide.

Madarai turned away from the window and headed to the shed's entrance. The door was wooden and light. He first touched it with just his fingertips, and once he confirmed it wasn't booby trapped, he turned the handle.

It didn't open. Someone must have locked it.

Madarai crouched, and observed the grass growing around the shed. Patches of the ankle-high weeds were bent at their tips. Someone had stepped on them recently.

– Well, that settles it.

However, this certainty did not at all come as a relief. Quite the opposite - the cautiousness Madarai had briefly forgotten returned in full force.

– So, what kind of trap has she prepared for me?

Madarai took a couple of deep breaths. Then, right after he let the deepest one out, he turned to the door and kicked it with all his strength.

Wham!

The door opened just a little bit, making a dull noise.

Wham! Wham!

After a few more kicks, the gap in the door was wide enough for a single person to pass through. Beyond that gap, there was only darkness. Madarai lowered his posture and slipped into it carefully.

"Excuse me, coming in…"

The sound of feet on sand rippled through the silence. The room was larger than it seemed from the outside, and the only illumination came from the flickering light outside the window, which had little effect on the gloomy dimness covering everything. Spiderwebs spread in every corner of the shed. Opposite the window was a large stack of shelves filled with paint cans. Gravel and dustballs were scattered all over the floor, with cleaning and maintenance tools cluttered here and there. In addition, several large heaps of fertilizer sacks were stacked all around the room.

"Hey, I know you're hiding here somewhere!"

Madarai's voice echoed through the small room, and suddenly his eyes were drawn to a certain spot. Behind one of the sack heaps, he thought he saw something moving. A small, shivering movement, almost as if in response to Madarai's voice.

– There she is.

Madarai advanced slowly toward the pile with increased cautiousness. There had to be a trap here, somewhere. Many of the tools in this shed could be used as a weapon in the hands of a scared prey. Madarai could see her in his mind, hiding in the darkness clutching one of them in her trembling hands.

"…What are you planning?"

Raising his voice and staying alert, he moved even closer to the pile of sacks. By the time he reached the middle of the room, his eyes were completely adjusted to the darkness.

"Well, if you plan to attack me, go right ahead," he said in a cruel, flat voice. "But I'm warning you, you will regret it later. You're going to be in a world of hu–!!??"

It was only for a second, but he had no clue what was going on. He felt something exploding on his face, and a moment later everything around him turned white.

"…Ku!" Moaning, he half-opened his eyes. His surroundings were engulfed in white fog.

"…Take that!" The prey, standing in front of his eyes, threw some kind of a white lump at him from behind the pile of sacks. As soon as the lump hit Madarai's body, it seemed to burst open and scatter in the air. As soon as the prey finished throwing, she thrust her hand into one of the sacks in front of her, grabbed a large amount of powder from it, and earnestly threw a third lump at him.

"Take that! And that!"

Madarai didn't flinch, but he was astounded. This was an "attack" in name only. A childish quarrel. It was like a snowball fight, using powder instead of snow.

"Stupid…!" Madarai's face twisted in anger. He got excessively upset at the thought he was being so cautious of what turned out to be nothing but a waste of time.

– Whatever. Let's just end this.

The flickering light reflected sharply in Madarai's eyes, when –

"…Do you know what a dust explosion is?" The girl raised her voice at the exact moment Madarai was about to move. His momentum was cut off, and he stopped instinctively.

"What do you think would happen… if I start a fire right now?"

"W…What are you…?"

Right now, the room was completely covered with flying white powder. A certain disturbing image crossed Madarai's mind. He could imagine the fire spreading from one dust particle to the next, igniting them and blowing up the entire shed.

"…If you do that, it's over for you too."

"…I thought it's over for me no matter what I do."

Upon hearing those words, Madarai remembered his own words. It's impossible to predict what someone in despair will do.

Madarai concentrated his eyes on the white fog. He could see the girl's silhouette beyond the dust, but he couldn't tell what expression was on her face. He brushed some of the dust from in front of his eyes, and could finally see her face.

It was completely blank.

Furthermore, her entire body had a strange intimidating air about it.

"Who the hell are you…?"

It wasn't the face of a frightened prey. Her colorless eyes didn't even twinkle. They were just staring directly at him, unflinching. Madarai's spine shivered.

"I don't think you can do it… There's nothing here you can use to start a fire."

"……"

The girl stayed silent. The air around Madarai became heavy as a feeling of tension wrapped itself firmly around his body. Dark emotions slowly corroded deep inside mind.

– Who the hell is that girl?

Madarai thought he could see his own shivering self reflected in her colorless eyes.

– Should I run away? Try to attack first?

The two options fluttered in rapid succession inside his head. Then, suddenly –

For just a split second - his victim's eyes moved.

Madarai turned by reflex to the point she was looking at – and saw an industrial vacuum cleaner in the middle of the clutter on the floor. Right next to it was a bare electric outlet.

Vaccum cleaner – Electric outlet – Sparks!

The thoughts connected inside his brain like in an association game. Before he knew it, Madarai started to move. He had no time to hesitate! No margin for caution! He had to get there faster than she could!

Madarai took off, almost as if leaping at the vacuum cleaner. He stretched his long arms towards it and grabbed the hose, and then pulled it strongly towards him as if he was about to wield it.

That was when he felt something was not quite right.

There was some resistance when he pulled. Too much resistance. That wasn't all – the girl herself didn't move a single step. He could see her standing still from the corner of his eye, even now that he had the vacuum cleaner in his hand. He even thought he saw her eyes glittering in anticipation.

– Oh, shit!

The sense that something wasn't right transformed into a single word in Madarai's mind.

– Trap.

…But, it was too late.

A large shadow covered Madarai's vision. It was the shadow of the large stack of shelves, inclining slowly towards him. Cans of paint clattered in slow motion as they fell down from the shelves, on their way toward him.

The shadow drew nearer.

It was already right in front of his eyes.

And then, with a thunderous roar and a cloud of dust –

Isshiki Madarai was flattened by the fallen shelves.

CHAPTER 10 - 11

The dust in the room was thrown up in the air, along with a roaring, ground-rumbling noise. The colorful cans of paint that were lined on the shelves had splattered their contents all over the walls and the ceiling, making the inside of the shed seem like it was lifted straight out of Wonderland.

I inhaled some of the dust, and managed to cough violently while giving a sigh of relief. I had predicted that Madarai's vigilant nature wouldn't let him leave the vacuum cleaner alone right after hearing about a dust explosion. It seems I was right.

I threw the shed's window open, grabbed a shovel and stepped carefully toward the fallen shelves in order to check the condition of the crushed boy. I had to feign bravery while I was confronting him, but my feet were still shaking with nervousness. The hand holding the shovel was already dripping with sweat.

"Hello…?"

I peeked nervously through the gap in the shelves, and saw Madarai pressed between them and the floor, as if he was the filling of a strange sandwich. It seemed he was still conscious, though, because he managed to look at me weakly.

"I…I can't believe I fell for that…" It seemed talking was painful for him, perhaps because his chest was under heavy pressure. "B…But… why wasn't there an explosion? T…There must have been static electricity and sparks from such a huge impact…"

"Ah. This is cement powder, so it won't explode," I answered, still brandishing the shovel.

"…Cement powder?"

I adjusted my hold on the shovel, and opened my notebook with my free hand.

"Um, let's see… The necessary conditions for a dust explosion are flammable dust, oxygen, and a source of fire… But cement powder isn't oxidized so it doesn't burn. In other words, it isn't flammable dust so it can't cause a dust explosion… That seems to be the explanation."

"And you… knew all that…"

"It seems the old man in charge of this shed really loves to talk… He sometimes catches random people and makes them listen to him ramble on… By the way, don't you think it's kinda shady that he told all that to a random high-school girl? But, I guess it ended up saving my life so I should go thank him once this is over…"

I flipped through my notebook some more, and continued.

"Anyway, it seems this old man is really into DIY projects, and loves to build anything that isn't too complicated on his

own. It looks like that's why he bought a large amount of cement powder, and stored it here in this shed."

"A…And you used that as a decoy…"

"Yes. I wanted you to pull that vacuum cleaner."

I dropped my eyes to the notebook again and nodded vigorously.

"Ah! By the way, have you heard of a movie called Home Alone? I used one of the traps from it as a basis for this one. I tied the vacuum cleaner and the shelves together with a rope, so that when you pull the vacuum cleaner the shelves come down after it… Oh, that's right – the dust's secondary purpose was to keep the rope hidden. I used a white rope, you see…"

"…You can stop now." Madarai interrupted me with a weak voice. "S…So… was this trap the ace up your sleeve…?"

"No… I have a different one. After all, in Home Alone, it wasn't Culkin-kun who ultimately stopped the robbers. It was the adults who came to save him. It was that way in both the first and the second movies. So, you see – the ace up my sleeve would be when someone comes to save me and…"

"…Yes, I get it. Please stop." Madarai twisted his face as if he was getting bored. "B…But, don't you think it's still early for you to think you've won?"

"…Huh?" His strange expression caught my attention, and I couldn't help returning a question. "Um… what do you mean?"

"I…I mean I haven't shown you… the ace up my sleeve yet…", leaving those words, Madarai finally sank into silence. He didn't reply even when I prodded him - it seemed he had lost his consciousness.

I had the feeling something was left half-baked, but since my notebook also taught me there's a chance I might catch pneumoconiosis if I inhale too much dust, I decided to first get out of the shed. Well, I guess the school's security department can take care of things later. I'll leave it to them to apprehend that strange boy - once they do, it's all going to be over. He committed the serious crime of assaulting a woman, so I think they're going to expel him from the school. And that means I'll never see him aga–

"…Bugyuuu!"

The person who let out a groan like a small animal being stepped on – was me.

I felt a sharp pain on my throat.

Something rugged was tightened around it, making it impossible to breathe.

– What?
– What's going on?

Even deep in confusion, I could tell there was a black telephone pole in front of my eyes.

– Wait, why a telephone pole?

I looked up, my thoughts becoming even more confused – and saw a white face on top of the tall and narrow telephone

pole. It appeared to be a man's face. Furthermore, it was a face I recognized. There are some things even someone as forgetful as me can recognize. I mean, that face –

Was the face of the man who was supposed to be unconscious under a stack of shelves - it was Madarai's face.

"…You seem surprised."

He wasn't injured. Even his clothes were perfectly clean.

"I think I know what you're thinking. 'Why is the man I just took down inside the shed now standing here strangling me?'… Am I right?" A cruel smile tore through Madarai's face. "To make things short, this is the ace up my sleeve. Well, a part of it, anyway."

His eyes, narrow to their limit, were fixed on me. They were oily and glittering.

"Well, then. I think I'll begin by breaking your arms and legs. It's going to hurt for just a little while, so please endure it patiently. Hmm, maybe I should wait until you lose consciousness… It's going to be a bother if you start screaming."

His tone of voice was more composed than cruel. It was clear it wouldn't be any use at all begging for my life.

Madarai applied even more strength into the hand that was strangling me, and I felt my consciousness slowly slipping away. I felt emptiness, as if my very own self was fading away, as each and every sensation was eradicated from my body.

I couldn't say anything anymore.

I couldn't breathe anymore.

I couldn't make any predictions anymore.

My notebook dropped from my hand. My eyes became hazy, my vision blurred. In front of my eyes, both the scenery and Madarai himself became twisted.

That's right. Twisted.

Madarai's body twisted, then flipped upside down as if it was drawing an arc in the air. Then, with a loud, thick sound, it crashed down on the ground head first.

That's what I saw.

From within my vanishing consciousness, which flickered in and out like a candle, I couldn't tell if it was reality or a dream – but nevertheless, I saw it.

"Guuuuuuu…"

Grunting like a trampled frog, Madarai quickly regained his posture. Then, the moment he jumped back up, his eyes were drawn to his right arm, and he stared at it, transfixed.

His right arm, from the elbow down…
…Was unnaturally twisted, like bent licorice candy.

At first, he just stared at it with a confused expression on his face. Then, as though he suddenly remembered how to, he raised his voice in a terrible scream.

"HIGYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!"

His voice was a mixture of confusion, terror and pain. It came out with such a force, that it almost seemed like he squeezed out every bit of air out of his body.

I heard that dreadful scream, but all I could do was stand there, dumbfounded. No, I didn't even know if I was still standing up, or if I fell to the ground. I couldn't understand anything that was going on. And then, I heard a voice I also could not understand.

"Upupu. I may have overdone it, just a little bit."

I'm not even sure I can call it a voice. A noise might be a more appropriate description.

"…Well, it's not like I had any choice. It would be a pain for me if you died here. After all, you're the protagonist of this story, at least for now."

That's when I noticed it.

I wonder how I could have missed it until now.

There was a pitch-black silhouette standing right before me. And on top of that black silhouette floated a face I remembered seeing somewhere before.

…But I couldn't remember. I couldn't remember whose face it was.

"Upupu. You don't remember who I am, do you, you bastard? I guess that's just natural. But don't worry - I'm sure you'll come to remember soon enough." After saying that in a laughing tone, the voice coming out of the shadow turned lower. "…But first, there's something that still requires taking care of here."

What happened next…
…Started before I knew what was going on, and ended in a split second.

First, there was a hand on top of Madarai's head. He was still on the ground, screaming. The hand started stroking his head, gently. Madarai looked up with a surprised expression on his face, when suddenly… there was a snapping noise and his head, fixed with the same expression, began to spin. Finally, it stopped at an inexplicable angle.

Madarai collapsed on the ground before he knew what was happening to him. He spitted red foam at my feet, his body convulsing in short spasms.

– Ah. This is just a dream.

That was the conclusion my mind reached then and there, and I could feel my body strangely relax. Yes, it couldn't be anything else. This scene is so far removed from reality, it can't possibly be anything but a dream.

"Upupupu."

Even that laughing voice echoing deep inside my ears… just a dream.

Before I knew what was happening, the black shadow was once again standing right in front of me. But, this is also definitely a dream.

The face floating on top of the shadow, who I was sure I've seen before, started talking again. "Until you can remember better, you should call me… Super High-school Level Despair. Yeah, I think that fits. Upupupu."

The eyes on that face were excessively dark. In fact, they looked more like holes than eyes. I stared at them blankly, and felt as if my consciousness was being sucked up into their void. Inside the holes was a bottomless swamp, full of black mud. My entire body was quickly drenched in it, as I was slowly consumed by something that wasn't myself.

Then, I heard a voice from somewhere far away.

"See you soon, you bastard! When we meet again, I'll kill you properly!"

It was a small voice, coming from far away, but at the same time it seemed like it was also whispering directly inside my ears.

– This sure is a strange dream.

With that last thought, I finally became totally submerged inside the bottomless swamp, and then my consciousness was completely lost.

"……Hm?", the girl tilted her neck.

"……Hm? Hm? Hm?", Junko Enoshima tilted her neck grandiosely.

"Hmmmmm… It's great that I came back and all, but… what's going on here?"

She swayed up from her crouching posture. There was something right in front of her eyes. It was a dead body. A man, his neck and arms twisted in a strange way.

"Um… Let's see. This guy is…" She raised her hand to her chin, and closed her eyes tightly, posing like a great detective on the verge of a huge deduction. After a short period of indecision, Junko Enoshima suddenly raised her voice in a cheer. "Oh, I remember! That's right, his name was Madarai! By the way, that's silly of me – forgetting who someone I just killed myself is… I hope that forgetfulness of hers isn't contagious. Just kidding! Aha! Ahahahahaha!"

Enoshima's laughter echoed through the night sky, and seemed to pile up on top of itself. It was as if there were more than one of her, laughing in simultaneous chorus.

But, the next moment, her laughter stopped. Her face turned sullen, as if she suddenly got tired of laughing.

"There's also the issue of that other missing body… Honestly, where did that old geezer go…?"

Suddenly, she was laughing again. There was a wide smile on her face, as if she had suddenly tired of sullenness.

"Well, it's not like it matters where he disappeared to, right? Upupu, I am so despair-inducingly great at planning plans!"

The second her declaration was done, her face turned sullen yet again.

"But, it's so unsatisfying when your plans always succeed… Whose fault is this? Is anyone going to take responsibility?"

Her expression changed with every sentence that came out of her mouth, but none of it was an act. Every time, it reflected her true feelings. Despair-inducing capriciousness - that's what she was all about.

"Super High-school Level Despair", Junko Enoshima.

With the sullen expression still on her face, Enoshima trotted towards Madarai's dead body. "It's your fault, y'know. Take that!" She started thrusting her tiptoes into the body. "Hey, say something! What's up with being so easy to kill?! You should've at least made an effort to disrupt my plans! How can I possibly despair like that?!"

At that point, she suddenly changed her voice. "I…It hurts! I'm sorryyyyyy!", she mimicked the dead Madarai's voice, as if she was on a morbid ventriloquism show. "Enoshima-sama! Please forgive me!" She continued kicking the body as she spoke for it with a comical, over-dramatic voice. Dark-red liquid came flowing out of the body's mouth. "I'll repent by committing suicide, so please forgive me!"

Enoshima returned to her normal voice. "But you can't do that! You're already dead!". Having delivered her grand punchline, she stepped hard on Madarai's face.

Splat. A thick sound of something being crashed echoed through the air.

"Upupupupupupupupupupupu!"

Enoshima laughed a loud vulgar laugh, as if her one-woman show was the funniest thing she'd ever heard. Nevertheless, she soon got tired of that too, and her face returned to its original expression.

"Well, then… I guess I have to call that pitiful sister of mine, and ask her to clean things up over here."

– First, I'll have her take care of this dirty body.
– Then, she'll have to clean up inside that shed, too.

"And finally, I just have to carry Ryouko Otonashi-chan to her beloved boyfriend, and my work here will be done!"

Having confirmed her immediate plans to herself, Enoshima started laughing again, as if she had just remembered something funny.

"Upupupupupupupupupupupu!!"

She laughed vulgarly and grandiosely, facing the sky, both her arms spread to her sides. Her cruel, gruesome laughter echoed high in the night sky. There was no coherence to it, nor any necessity or sentiment.

That was what "Super High-school Level Despair" Junko Enoshima was all about.

CHAPTER 12

When I finally opened my eyes, there was a ceiling above me.

It seems I fell asleep somewhere, but since, being forgetful, I always forget the circumstances I've fallen asleep in, I wasn't especially confused. I calmly turned my eyes from the ceiling and saw a window. A clear beam of sunlight came in through a gap in the curtains, illuminating the white room I was in. It seems it was morning.

This room… It was a room I couldn't remember. But that's the same as always, too.

Anyway, my first order of business should be to calmly confirm the situation in "Ryouko Otonashi's Memory Notebook", and so I calmly tried to rise up from the bed – and then realized that I couldn't.

"…What's going on?"

My body was firmly tied to the bed with a sturdy-looking rope. It was a magnificent knot I could only describe as "craftsmanlike", and it bound me so tightly I could hardly move my body at all. I couldn't even turn my neck well, which made looking around the room impossible. At this point, I finally started to feel panic at this incoherent state of affairs. In other words, I went from "What's going on?" to "What's going on?!!".

"W…What's going on?!!"

But, no matter how much I struggled, all I could do was shake and rattle the bed. Not only did the diligently tied rope show no signs of becoming looser, it seemed to actually be getting tighter.

"S…Someone…!" I started screaming, carried away by fear. "H…HELP MEEEEEEEE!!"

Once I started, I couldn't stop.

"PLEEEEEEEEEEEASE!" I screamed and screamed and screamed. "SOOOOOOOOOMEONE! HELP MEEEEEEEEEEE!"

Then, after my earnest calls for help has been going on for a short while –

"You're being too loud, dung beetle."

The words were abusive, but my heart start beating even faster than it already was!

"Eh? Matsuda-kun?"

"If you want to scream, do it more quietly, you dullard."

"It is you, Matsuda-kun!"

From the moment I knew for certain that the mocking voice belonged to my beloved Matsuda-kun, my only desire was to rush and search for him. But since my head was tightly tied to the bed, I couldn't even look around.

"Where are you, Matsuda-kun?" I called, frantically.

"Where…? I'm right under you, isn't that obvious?"

"Huh? Under me?"

"I'm under the bed you're lying on, you cheap woman."

Even disregarding his cheap woman comment, what he said was most unexpected.

"Eh? Why are you under the bed?"

"I'm doing mental concentration exercises to subdue my anger."

Being in the midst of a bondage situation I couldn't confirm it with my own eyes, but his voice certainly seemed to come from the other side of the bed. It seemed that he was, in fact, under it.

"……Um, are mental exercises usually done under beds?"

"For me, they are."

It seems Matsuda-kun is a man of many colors.

"Hey, Matsuda-kun. If something is troubling you, you can always come to me. I'll listen to your troubles anytime."

"I think I'll take you up on that offer, then…"

Matsuda-kun breathed deeply once, and then suddenly started talking his mouth off.

"On the dawn of a sleepless night, I was informed that an ugly friend of mine went missing. So, I had no choice but to go searching for her all over the place. But when I came back to the lab I suddenly discovered her ugly, dirty body lying on top of my bed, sleeping like a log and snoring to boot. Care to tell me how best to handle the anger that had engulfed me then?"

"……That sounds like a truly ugly friend you have."

"It's you."

Yep. That was to be expected!

"…Um, so I've gone missing?"

"Someone who can't even remember themselves going missing shouldn't be allowed to act freely. I guess tying you up was a good decision."

…That means the person who tied me up was Matsuda-kun. How surprising! I wouldn't have imagined he could tie such a masterful knot! This is even a little stimulating!

"Anyway, I'm going to keep you tied for a while so you can reflect on what you did."

"…Um, how long would you estimate 'a while' is?"

"Let's see… Until the next World Cup would be –"

"That's too long!!"

"…I guess you have a point. Well, then - we'll make it most of today."

"Even that's a little excessive! One shouldn't tie their lover to a bed for an entire day!"

"Who are you calling your lover? I'm not the type of weirdo that would have vermin as a girlfriend."

"V…Vermin…?"

I couldn't find anything to say in response to his excessive nastiness. In any case, it appears that he really was angry, and not just faking it. The fact that he now stayed quiet proved it.

On top of the bed, I was silent.

Under the bed, Matsuda-kun was silent.

That awkward silence continued for a while.

After some time passed, Matsuda-kun sighed and said, "…Honestly, you've always been that way."

"Eh? What are you talking about?"

"I just remembered. Something like this happened before… You've always known the perfect ways to irritate me."

"I'm not sure if I want to hear about it or not… but I guess I want to, after all. So, what happened before?"

Matsuda-kun started telling the story slowly, as he struggled to turn the memories in his head into words.

"It was… just after you started elementary school."

I was surprised at how old this story seemed to be, but at the same time I was happy. It meant I've been together with Matsuda-kun ever since I was little, and that he remembered such an ancient story about me.

But, I don't remember it, of course. There's nothing I can do about that.

"You were skillful in the sandpit, and started building a surprisingly large and intricate sand sculpture at the public park. It was modeled after the Sagrada Familia church. That's really amazing, isn't it? I mean, a tiny elementary school student deciding she wants to build the Sagrada Familia! And on top of that, you even knew how to use some advanced techniques involving hardening the sand with some water. It took you an entire month to build."

"A…An entire month?!"

"The real Sagrada Familia has been under construction for over a hundred and twenty years. and it still isn't complete. It isn't too surprising it would take that long to build a perfect replica out of sand…"

But still, an entire month! I wonder what I wanted to prove back then.

"It was truly an amazing sand sculpture. No one could believe it was built by an elementary school student. As you were

getting closer to completion, many people from around the neighbourhood came over just to watch you work. It was a huge success. But… you never did get to complete it."

"Eh? Why? You said I was really close to…"

Matsuda-kun answered my question in a somewhat depressed tone.

"Someone destroyed it. Just when it was about to be completed."

"D…Destroyed it…?" An image suddenly appeared in the back of my mind. An image of the pitiful wreck of a sand sculpture that's been trampled on.

"W…What the heck? You have to be a truly heartless person to destroy the work of an elementary school girl!" I was still tied to the bed, but my voice had fire raging in it.

"At the time, you said the same thing and started crying hysterically. You cried continuously for almost an entire day."

"Well, that's to be expected!" I felt intense sympathy for my elementary school self.

"As you'd expect, I felt angry about what happened and decided to go search for the culprit myself… but, no matter how much I searched, I couldn't find a trace of them. There wasn't even supposed to be anyone at the park when the Sagrada Familia got destroyed except for you. I couldn't find any other witnesses, and my investigation reached a dead end. I think I got really depressed at that point… I remember sitting on a bench at the park staring at the remains of the Sagrada Familia, when you suddenly came running to me. Surprisingly, you had a huge smile on your face, like I've never seen before."

"Ah, I got it! I must have found the culprit myself!"

"No, that wasn't it." He sounded as if it would be much better had that been the case.

"You came and whispered in my ear. You told me to keep it a secret, but that it was you who destroyed the Sagrada Familia."

"……Huh?" I was struck by complete surprise. "Um… so, I spent a full month working on a sand sculpture, and when it was nearing completion, I destroyed it myself?"

"An irritating story, isn't it?"

"I…Irritating or not… why would I ever do such a thing in the first place?"

"I asked you that. You said it was an accident. I mean, in that case you should've said so from the beginning! Thanks to you, I wasted a lot of time searching for a culprit!"

To think I wasted an entire month of work with an accident… How much of an idiot was I? I can't sympathise at all.

"When all is said and done, you just used me as your plaything. So, do you get it now? Do you get how much of a bother you are?"

"Yep! I guess I'm at a level where it's best to just tie me up after all!"

"We have reached a rare agreement, then."

Just like that, I approved myself being tied up – but I still had one regret. It was an intense regret that I'm not even sure a word like "regret" describes very well.

"Grrrrrrrrrrrr…"

"What is it? Does your stomach hurt?"

"……No, that's not it. It's just vexing. I finally got to hear Matsuda-kun speaking about his memories of me, but since I don't have my notebook I'm going to forget it all soon. Grrrr."

"If you want your notebook, I put it right next to the pillow."

"Eh? Really?" My heart leaped at this unexpected lifeboat for love. "Which side? Left or right? Or maybe, neither of them?"

"Calm down, dimwit. It should be to your right."

If it's to my right, I should concentrate on my right side! I strained the eyeball muscles and turned them toward the pillow. As expected, there was something there that looked like a notebook. "Ah! There it is!"

I stretched my neck like a turtle, and got the tip of the notebook between my lips. Then, I abused my tongue muscles and somehow succeeded in getting the notebook open.

…Opening it is one thing, but how am I supposed to write anything? As I contemplated that fundamental problem, a certain sentence entered my field of vision by chance.

"It seems Junko Enoshima killed him —"

The letters looked like twisted hieroglyphs that were written with a very shaky hand.

I didn't understand what they meant.

"Junko Enoshima killed him…? Is this about a movie or something?"

I heard a loud bang from under the bed, and felt it shake from the power of the impact.

"…Oy. What did you say?" Matsuda-kun's voice was suddenly very stiff. "What was it you said just now?"

"Eh? Um…", I was disturbed by the intensity of his voice and used my eyeball muscles once again to look at the notebook, when another shocking sentence appeared in front of me.

"I discovered a dead body at the central plaza"

– A dead body?

It took me about three seconds to understand what I just read. Then, I started screaming.

"A…A…A dead bodyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy?!"

The rope dug forcefully into my body as I tried to jump out of the bed. "Owowowowowowow–" I screamed a different type of scream.

Nevertheless, Matsuda-kun didn't seem to care about my predicament. He just asked the question again in his stiff voice.

"You said… Junko Enoshima, didn't you?"

But, I didn't care about some girl's name anymore.

"A…A dead body! I…It says here I found a dead body! W-W-W-What am I going to do? …What do you do when you find a body?"

"More importantly, answer my question. Do you know who Junko Enoshima is?"

– More importantly?

Upon hearing those words, a bad feeling spread through my body. I mean… what could be more important than discovering a body? That's just not natural.

"H…Hey, Matsuda-kun," I boldly decided to ask him directly. "You seem to be worried about that Junko Enoshima person. Is she a friend of yours or something?"

I could hear a short gulping sound from under the bed.

"H…Hey, Matsuda kun –"

"There is no dead body."

"……Eh?"

"If you really had found one… the school would've been in an uproar by now. There is no way you did…"

"T…That's not it… About that girl… um, what was her name again…?"

I looked for my notebook, and discovered that it slipped to the area of my chest when I was screaming and struggling. No matter how much I stretched my neck and tongue, I couldn't get to it anymore.

"…That's enough. I was mistaken. That girl has nothing to do with either me or you. Forget about it."

For some reason, I got the impression his words were colored with irritation.

"B…But, I can't just forget it that easily… I mean, it was written right there in my notebook so it must be something that really happened to me…"

"That's not necessarily true."

"……Eh?"

"Finding a body… Meeting a strange girl… They're most likely just stories you made up. You're simply mistaking them

for true memories right now."

"I…I'd never write made up stories in my notebook… I mean, if I did they'd get mixed up with my memories, which would be a terrible thing…"

"Maybe that's exactly why you did it?"

"Eh?"

"I'm thinking you may have mixed fake stories with your memories on purpose."

My heart became hazy as I listened to his blunt words.

"W…Why would I do such a thing?"

"You're always saying how nothing has anything to do with you. Nevertheless, you must feel lonely sometimes, don't you? You can't retain any memories so you can't form connections with anyone around you… I'm sure that can get very lonely."

"…Huh?" I felt my breathing becoming rough.

"That's right. You got lonely. That's why you fabricated all of those delusional stories–"

"I've never been lonely!" I screamed, not being able to take it anymore.

"Oh, and you remember that?!" Matsuda's sullen voice yelled back from under the bed.

"That's not it at all!" I screamed even louder. Matsuda-kun's words were so off the mark – they so misunderstood who I was – that I couldn't do anything but scream.

"I'm sure I told you a million times! I'm sure you got tired of hearing me blabbering about it! As long as I have Matsuda-kun I'm fine! As long as I have Matsuda-kun I'd never get lonely! I'm sure I told you that many, many times!"

I screamed so hard my breathing got out of order. I screamed so hard my voice buzzed inside my own ears. It might have been cowardly to shelve my own forgetfulness, but I wanted Matsuda-kun to remember, no matter the cost. I couldn't give up.

"If I can remember that despite my forgetfulness… how can you forget it, Matsuda-kun?!"

After the echos of my screams were gone, there was silence.

An awkward silence.

Finally, Matsuda-kun broke the silence with a whisper. "……Anyway, what's written there is a lie." He probably wanted to put an end to the conversation once and for all, but I couldn't accept it that easily.

"But… if this notebook is a lie… If I can't trust my own notebook anymore… what is there left for me to believe in…?"

"Believe in me."

"Eh…?"

"Believe in me, and forget what's written there."

Had these been normal circumstances, my heart would probably leap at those words. But, that was impossible right now. There was a conflict inside my heart that overcame any heart throbbing. The only two certain things in my life clashed heavily, and I was swaying violently from the shock, as if I was a small boat caught in a storm.

"Ryouko Otonashi's Memory Notebook" was the one and only trusted route to my memories.

Matsuda-kun was the one and only existence connecting me to the rest of the world.

In other words, I had the ultimate choice in front of me. Should I believe in myself? Or should I believe in Matsuda-kun?

I finally reached a conclusion.

"In that case… always be by my side, Matsuda-kun. If you do… I can give away my memories…"

Matsuda-kun stayed quiet for a while under the bed. I waited, motionless. I waited until he gave me an answer. Then, he finally did.

"Right now… that's impossible."

But, it was the exact opposite of what I hoped for.

I was dumbfounded, and could only return an absent-minded question of my own.

"If not now… then when would it be possible?"

"……I don't know."

"Y…You… don't know?"

"Anyway, it's impossible right now. I can't be with you. There are other things I must do."

Things he must do? I guess, that must be…

"…I see. The most important thing to you is your research… Which means, no matter how much I choose you, you will not choose me back." All I could do now was grudgingly whisper those words of resentment.

"No, that's not it. I –" It seemed Matsuda-kun was about to say something, but he held his tongue at the last minute. He sank into silence, and said nothing more. It doesn't matter how much I wait, he is never going to say the words I yearn for.

"In that case… at least cure me…" My head felt hot, and my view of the ceiling got blurry. My face was probably covered in tears. Snot was probably gushing out of my nose. But, I couldn't stop the stream of emotions flowing out of me anymore.

"And if you can't cure me, at least make me forget about you too!" My screams were now mixed with sobbing, as I let everything out at once. "It hurts too much that you're the only thing I can remember! I'd rather not remember anything at all!"

The rope dug deeper into my body as I raged and loudly scraped my skin. Nevertheless, I couldn't even feel the pain and continued to scream.

"I've had it! Make me forget! Make me forget about you, Matsuda-kun!"

There was a rustling noise from under the bed. Then, Matsuda-kun rose up and stood by it. He was quiet, and looked down at me sobbing violently. Then, he quietly took a tissue out of his pocket and started wiping my face.

I gazed at him.

Almond eyes carved in the middle of a pale, unhealthy-looking face. Thin, black hair hanging down near the corners of the eyes. Long, feminine eyelashes. A pointed chin. Thin, small lips. Long, white fingers. That was Matsuda-kun.

But, his face… his face looked lonely.

He looked at me with lonely eyes, and gently wiped the tears and the snot off my face.

For some reason, I felt fear washing over my body. Fear stronger than any regret at the words I just said. Matsuda-kun –

Then, just as I was about to open my mouth again, Matsuda-kun's hand stopped moving. He quietly turned aside, and started walking toward his desk. Soon, he disappeared from my field of vision.

"M…Matsuda-kun…" I finally managed to speak again, but –

"…I have an appointment I have to go to." I could hear his voice from somewhere outside my field of vision. "I've been entrusted with the treatment of a certain student… I can't postpone it."

"…You're going?"

"I'll be back soon. We will continue this discussion then."

Soon, I could hear his footsteps walking away, and then the lonely sound of the door closing.

– He went away…

Every bit of energy in my body faded out with a single ashen sigh. Then, I suddenly remembered the heavy pressure on my chest.

"He could've at least loosened the rope…"

My body was engulfed with fatigue, but the pain I felt wasn't the rope's fault. Its source was clear. I closed my eyes, trying to escape the anguish.

I wanted to fall asleep. I wanted to forget everything…

With that thought in mind, I slowly started dissolving my own consciousness away.

Slowly, slowly…

Suddenly, I felt the floaty feeling of my body being released.

– Huh?

I gathered up my dissolved consciousness, and when I opened my eyes I discovered that the rope that had bound me was now untied.

"…Matsuda-kun?"

I rose up from the bed and looked around the laboratory, but there was no one there.

– So, how did the rope become untied?

– So, how did the rope become untied?

I wondered if it could have been a time-based mechanism, or if I could secretly be a talented escape artist. As I contemplated those possibilities I took a good look around the laboratory, and noticed a hot water dispenser on one of the tables.

I guess I should make myself some tea, to calm me down.

Soon after the idea came to my mind, I poured some boiling water into a small teapot. The fragrance of tea leaves tickled my nose. I poured myself a cup of tea, and slowly sipped a mouthful. The hot, strong liquid washed down from my gullet to my stomach… and I finally calmed down.

"I see you've finally calmed down."

"……Eh?"

A small boy I didn't recognize appeared out of nowhere, and was standing in front of me.

"KYAAAAAAAAA!" I dropped my teacup in surprise, and it hit me directly on the foot. "GYAAAAAAAA!" I writhed from the sudden agony.

"Ha ha! You sure are a scatterbrain, sister!"

"Who… Who are you?!" I managed to ask the innocent-looking laughing boy through the pain.

"Hm? You've forgotten already? Didn't we just meet last night?"

– We met last night?

I dragged along my foot, which was already numb with pain, and stepped to the bed where "Ryouko's Otonashi's Memory Notebook" was still lying. I picked it up and leafed through the pages.

"Ah, I see!" I suddenly remembered. "Could you be the boy I left a message to Matsuda-kun with at the dorms…?"

"Bingo! You're perfectly correct! I am Yuuto Kamishiro, a student in Hope's Peak Academy's 77th class!"

"Um… When did you come in here?" I asked. I mean, I didn't notice him entering at all!

"Well, it's natural that you didn't notice," Kamishiro-kun suppressed a giggle and sat down on top of the desk. "But, that's the wrong question to ask."

"…Eh? What do you mean?"

Kamishiro-kun's mouth twisted in a broad grin. "I didn't come in. I've been here all along."

"A…All along…?"

"Well, ever since Yasuke Matsuda tied you to the bed with that rope, at least. I heard every bit of that lover's quarrel you had after that, of course. Speaking of, that sure was one impressive knot he tied! I'll have to ask him to teach it to me some other time."

"Um… In other words…" I tried using every bit of my brain to make sense of the situation. "You've been hiding somewhere in the lab since the beginning, and peeped on what Matsuda-kun and I were doing?"

"How rude! I may be a pervert, but I'm not the kind of pervert who hides and peeks!" Kamishiro-kun puffed his cheeks. I wasn't sure why he was upset.

"But, if you weren't hiding, we would surely have noticed you… I mean, if not me, Matusda-kun would've…"

"You still don't get it, do you? Very well, let me explain it directly." Kamishiro-kun suddenly thrust out his chest. "You didn't notice me because of my talent," he declared cheerfully. "I am a 'Super High-school Level Secret Agent', after all!" He puffed his chest even more, and soon looked as if he was bending over backwards.

"Super High-school Level… Secret Agent?"

"You know, like in '007' and 'Mission Impossible'… You must have seen one of these movies at some point. I'm just like that. A spy, if you will."

"A spy…?" Unfortunately, I had no memory of ever seeing either of the movies he mentioned, and couldn't quite grasp what he meant.

"As long as I can remember, people have been telling me how short and plain and insignificant I look." While speaking, he took out a large melon bread from somewhere – honestly, it's a mystery where he could hide such a thing inside his outfit – and continued, chewing loudly.

"When I was a child, I hated my lack of presence… but then I had a realization. This is not a disadvantage. Quite the opposite - it's an incredible talent! I mean, if you have no presence, no one's going to notice you! I could flourish as a spy or a ninja! Yep - it wasn't a fault at all. It was a talent bestowed upon me from heaven. If I use it, I could become a super-spy that saves the world! The kind that gets a license to kill!"

The second he finished talking, Kamishiro-kun stuffed the rest of the melon bread he still held in his hand into his mouth.

"In other words… you weren't hiding at all… but we simply couldn't notice you?"

Kamishiro-kun gulped down the bread in his mouth. "Yes, exactly!" he said, smiling widely. "At first, I came here in order to fulfill the promise I made to you yesterday. You know, the message I was supposed to pass. But when I got here I saw you and Matsuda-kun already found each other, so I thought the message wasn't necessary anymore. But, it was a waste to just go back home, so I thought I'd go and show off my talent."

"Show off your power…" I frowned. "But… why?"

"So I could help you with that incident you've gotten yourself involved with, of course!" Kamishiro-kun looked at me with passion-filled eyes that didn't match his boyish face at all. "Now that you've seen me do it, you get it, right? I can easily gather any information you require. I can solve any problem. The more dangerous the incident is, the more excited I get. That's just the type of man I am! Even if this turns out to be about a terrorist plan to steal a nuclear warhead… Ah! My body shivers just imagining that!"

Kamishiro-kun's body indeed shivered a little in excitement at his own words. His entire body oozed some strange kind of innocent madness.

"You're a strange one, aren't you…"

"Fair enough. If I wasn't, I wouldn't be in this school!"

He was right, of course. This is Hope's Peak Academy we're talking about – I'm probably just as strange!

"So, what are you going to do, sister? I think your best course of action right now is to gain another ally. And not just a regular ally - I'm a specialist's specialist! A pro at intelligence gathering!" Kamishiro-kun pulled out another piece of pastry – does his outfit really have the space to store that many? – but his hand suddenly stopped before it entered his mouth. "What the…? This is butter peanut bread! What a disappointment!" His shoulders drooped, dejected.

"Is butter peanut bread really a disappointment? It sounds delicious to me…"

"What are you saying, sister?! Peanuts and bread are the worst possible combination! It's like trying to eat miso and rice together!"

I think that comparison made it even harder for me to understand, but I just said "Yeah, of course!". I didn't think it worth the bother of fighting over, so I decided to let it slide.

"Aha, so you do understand! Here, you can have it." Having cheered up, Kamishiro-kun handed me the sticky butter peanut bread, then anxiously thrust his hand into his shirt again and pulled out a new pastry. "Yes! A Yamazaki Madeira Cake!" It seems he hit the jackpot this time. His cheeks puffed and a wide smile appeared on his face as he started chewing the bread. "Fo, fwha aa foo foin' foo foo?"

"…Um, what did you just say?"

Kamishiro-kun swallowed the bread in his mouth. "So, what are you going to do?" he said, his eyes turning scarily serious as he gave me a questioning look. "That is, I think your only option is to let me help you. As far as I can tell, you're the type of person who can't do anything properly by herself, and all you've achieved so far is just wandering around in confusion. When you have plumbing problems you call a professional plumber, and when you've gotten involved in the kind of trouble you're in right now, you need a professional like me. I am exactly the kind of person who can clear up this kind of incident. Right now… we fit together like male and female genitalia. You're a confused person in trouble, and I'm a person who can solve such problems. It's easy to tell what the next step should be, isn't it? It's even more obvious than ejaculation."

"W…Wait a second!", I stopped his speech, confused.

"Hm? What's wrong?"

"Um… Didn't you break character a little bit just now?"

"Not really," he answered nonchalantly.

"I guess… I was just imagining it, then…" I thought I heard him pepper his speech with some inappropriate phrases – but I must have just not been paying attention. I just heard him wrong. That must be it.

"So, have you decided what you're going to do yet? If you're just going to continue wandering around in confusion, your troubles are never going to get solved. I think your best course of action right now is to make the right decision and let me handle things."

"My troubles…" At this point, I had to read my notebook again in order to put my thoughts in order. I had already forgotten what the exact nature of the trouble I was involved in was. But, the moment I read the explanation my heart started palpitating at an unusually violent pace.

I closed the notebook in panic.

Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my god!

It was unreasonable beyond unreason. It seems I've goten involved in an abnormal situation to top all abnormal situations. I am pretty sure I won't find a way to handle such a situation inside "Ryouko Otonashi's Memory Notebook", no matter how much I search.

I don't have enough data –

And I definitely don't have enough experience –

Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my god!

I raised my eyes in haste, and they met the eyes of the boy in front of me, who was still chewing some kind of pastry.

"It seems you made your decision."

"…Eh?"

"Well, then. I guess I'll have you tell me exactly how you got yourself involved in this incident now!"

It seems he could read something in my eyes, and was already ready to take over. He's right, though. There's probably nothing else I can do. If I can't take care of this myself, I have no choice but to rely on other people. Even I can understand such simple reasoning.

Other people. Other people who are not Matsuda-kun.

It seems the time has finally come to put myself in the care of people who had nothing to do with me until now.

"What are you waiting for? C'mon, let me hear all about it. Go on!"

"O…Okay…"

Urged by Kamishiro-kun, who acted like a dog craving pet food, I opened my notebook again. But, before I could explain about the trouble I was in, I had to explain to him about my "forgetfulness".

"…Huh. I can't say I'm jealous, but that is one interesting trait you have there." His face looked like he has just seen an unusual souvenir from some exotic foreign country.

I continued my story. I told him about the past memories that were stolen from me, about how I was invited to the central plaza and found a dead body there, about my meeting with Junko Enoshima –

The events I was reading in my notebook were enough to make my voice tremble, but Kamishiro-kun just listened attentively, narrowing his eyes. Then, as I completed the first part of the story and came to a pause, he finally spoke.

"…Hmmm. I never imagined I'd hear Junko Enoshima's name here…"

– Huh? I have a feeling I recently got the same kind of response from someone else…

"Oh? Are you surprised I reacted to Junko Enoshima's name more than I did to the dead body? It was just the same with Matsuda-kun before. Ahaha, I guess you were right, sister - you really are forgetful! That's amazing!"

"…That's really not something you should admire, you know."

Kamishiro-kun pulled himself together in agreement. "Well, I think I get the general idea about your situation. I'm a super-spy so I don't get too shocked by dead bodies, but… this really is quite an incident you've gotten yourself involved with. And if that Junko Enoshima girl is connected to it… then it's probably also an especially atrocious situation. Yep,

you were right when you decided to let me handle it."

"Do you, perhaps, know this Junko Enoshima?" I asked. He sure talked as if he did.

"Not directly, no. But I feel that she and I share a destiny. A stiff destiny."

"…Excuse me?"

"You sure had an experience straight out of Hollywood blockbuster, haven't you? No need to worry, though – whoever the lead character was previously, I'm taking over that role now. This is going to be a thrilling spy-suspense story from now on!"

"Thrilling… that's an odd phrase to use for your own life…"

"Ahaha! You shouldn't think too hard about that!" Kamishiro-kun thrust his hand into his clothes again and pulled out yet another pastry. "Yay! A choco-swirl!" he cheered, and then returned to his explanation.

"I am currently investigating a different incident, you see, and that's where I heard the name 'Junko Enoshima'. At the time, I didn't think she was such an important key figure… But if she's also involved in your incident, I guess that changes the story. I mean, it would be too much of a coincidence for the same girl to be involved in two different incidents." Kamishiro-kun's eyes glittered. He was right when he said the more dangerous the incident the more excited he gets.

"By the way, aren't you curious what that other incident might be? Aren't you?!"

"Y…Yeah, I guess…" I reluctantly nodded in agreement, since he was pressing the question hard.

"Hmmm. Should I even tell you? It might be bad if word of this leaks out…" His attitude reeked of assumed importance despite the fact that it was him who brought the subject up in the first place. "Oh, who cares?" He dismissed his worries lightly, as I expected him to. This is a very tiresome person indeed!

"Actually… I'm not sure we should even call it a 'different incident'."

"…Eh? What do you mean?"

"I think the two incidents might be connected. That's what I mean."

Connected? The two incidents?

"By the way, I suggest you keep your mouth shut regarding that 'other incident'… It is quite a dangerous incident, and there's even a chance the worst might happen." Done with this preface, Kamishiro-kun starting pacing around the room, as if he was a detective announcing the result of his investigation. "That 'other incident' I am talking about… is the incident that was given the codename 'The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History'."

Suddenly, my heart started beating as if small bombs were going off inside it.

– Huh? What's going on?

"The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History" – it was an absurd title straight out of fiction, and yet something inside me reacted to its mention. I felt as if a heavy load was suddenly pressing down on both my shoulders.

My hand, which was flipping through the notebook as I read it over, came to a sudden stop.

"Hey, sister, what's wrong?" When I came back to myself, I found Kamishiro-kun staring intently at my face. "You seem to be in pain… Do you need Youmeishu or Kyushin or something?"

"N…No… I'm fine, it's nothing." I took a couple of deep breaths, and somehow managed to calm myself.

"In that case… aren't you curious to hear what kind of incident The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History was? You must be, right? You must!"

"I…I guess…" He was pressing hard again, so I had to reluctantly agree for the second time.

"Well, you see…" Kamishiro-kun closed his eyes and raised both his hands. "I don't really know the exact details myself."

"Y…You don't know…?!" I complained. He was the one who raised the subject in the first place!

"Well, I know what the rumors are."

"Rumors…?"

"To tell you the truth, I've only heard rumors about the incident in question, and I'm still investigating whether it really happened or not. Right now, it's at the same level as the school's seven supernatural mysteries… Except that someone actually decided to name it 'The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History'."

"I…I see…" So it's just a rumor. It was silly for me to be so nervous – but, just as I was about to loosen my stressed shoulders –

"Hey, you shouldn't relax just yet." I felt as if Kamishiro-kun's narrow eyes looked down at me from above. "Even if it is a rumor, there's a good chance it might be true. And if it's true… it was one truly terrible incident. This is one bad rumor we're talking about. You really shouldn't relax just yet."

I didn't want to listen to him anymore. That was my honest, true feeling. Nevertheless, it seemed I was out of luck.

"But if you still want to hear all about it, I guess I have no choice! Here, listen!" He was already in full swing, engrossed in his own words. "You see, here's what 'The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History' is all about…"

Kamishiro-kun coughed a small cough, and then stated theatrically: "Fifteen Hope's Peak Academy students suddenly disappeared, and thirteen of them were later found dead… That's 'The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History'."

I was taken aback. It was too strange. Too bizarre. It didn't seem even a little real.

"But… that's just a rumor, isn't it?" I asked, seeking confirmation. Kamishiro-kun shook his head.

"Had I been sure it was just a rumor, I wouldn't be investigating it right now."

"B…But…"

"It seems there really are some students who disappeared," he whispered as if telling a secret. "About a month before

the rumor started spreading, fourteen members of Hope's Peak Academy's student council were suddenly called to an overseas facility, and are now apparently studying abroad. Don't you think that's a little suspicious?"

"T…That's just a coincidence… Ah! The rumor said fifteen went missing, didn't it? The number doesn't fit at all! I guess it was just a rumor after –"

"Those are just details." Kamishiro-kun fluttered his hand. "I mean, it is just a rumor right now."

First he says it's just a rumor, than he scares me by saying it's real, and now he's going back. Is he doing this on purpose?

"…Well, whatever. How about we return to your problem, sister?"

"Eh? My problem?"

"Have you forgotten already? We were worried about how this Junko Enoshima is related to this incident."

I looked down at my notebook again. Oh, that's right! I remember! This strange rumor about dead students has nothing to do with me! What I should be worried about is this insane girl called Junko Enoshima that I encountered!

"So, aren't you curious? Aren't you curious about how Junko Enoshima is related to The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History? That's where the reason she's after you might be hidden, after all! You're curious, aren't you!"

"Yeah! Please tell me!" I pressed the pressing Kamishiro-kun.

"Well, you see…" Kamishiro-kun smiled a wide smile. "I don't really know."

"……Huh?" A sudden dizziness grabbed me. "Y…You don't know… What the…"

I trembled in fear, but Kamishiro-kun was indifferent. He started pacing around the room again.

"But, about a month before the rumors of the incident started spreading, Hope's Peak Academy's executive office conducted an investigation regarding her. Don't you find that suspicious?"

"It's very suspicious!" I regained my posture and raised my voice in excitement. "If they investigated her, there's a good chance she's the culprit!"

"…Don't get excited so fast. We're still not even sure if the rumor is true."

He's right. As I made my hypothesis, I somehow convinced myself the incident really did happen.

"But… If this rumor is true… and if she is the culprit behind it… don't you think she would be caught by now if Hope's Peak conducted an investigation?" Kamishiro-kun leaned on a desk and continued. "Furthermore, it appears that it was Junko Enoshima herself who started the rumor about 'The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History' in the first place."

"…Eh?"

"That makes it unlikely that she's the culprit. I mean… a culprit spreading a rumor about their own crime? That would be far too dangerous."

"But, is it really true? Was it really Junko Enoshima who started that rumor…?"

"The rumor started a few weeks ago when a cryptic email message describing the incident was sent to every student in Hope's Peak's preparatory school."

"And… was it Junko Enoshima who sent that email?"

Kamishiro-kun nodded as if he was swallowing something. "There's an underclassman of mine who's exceptionally good with computers and who I have monitor the school's servers for me now and then. That's how I found out about the email. There wasn't any sender name on it, of course, but I easily figured that out using my super-spy abilities. Oh, and just so you won't make any wrong assumptions, I never told that underclassman about the contents of the email or about the sender's identity. It would be very selfish of me to involve unrelated passers-by with dangerous incidents!"

I was just about to give a witty reply about how he's involving me with this incident, but decided at the last moment that it wasn't the place or time for that.

"But, why would Junko Enoshima do such a thing? Why spread a rumor about such an incident…?"

"That, I do not know", he proclaimed his ignorance in a bright voice yet again.

"Ah! How about we ask her directly?" I had a flash of inspiration. "Let's find Junko Enoshima and ask her what's going on!"

"If that was possible, I'd have done it already…" Kamishiro-kun shook his head in dismay. "I'm not sure why, but I can't manage to find this Junko Enoshima anywhere. She isn't going to any classes, and the teachers seem to allow it. Her classmates also have no idea what's going on… I'm telling you, that girl is allowed too much freedom. It's possible she's even been expelled, since even I can't locate her."

"But, I did meet her. Right here, in this school… That's what my notebook says."

"She probably wanted you involved in this, no matter the cost, sister. That's why she appeared before you, stole that notebook of yours and made that mysterious confession about a murder she had committed… But, I have no clue what her intentions are. It's so far out that all we can currently do is laugh about it. Kyahahaha!" Kamishiro-kun linked his arms behind his head and laughed naturally.

"Wait…! This isn't a time to laugh! This is serious!" I chided him in response.

"It's fine, it's fine. It's not like we're in any hurry," Kamishiro-kun replied, letting out a yawn. "The only reason we don't understand it yet is because my investigation is still going. As soon as I get back on the case, we'll know the rest of the details in no time. But right now, it's meaningless to make any hypotheses and conjectures. By which I mean, leave the rest to me!" Kamishiro-kun produced yet another pastry from somewhere, as if to signal that the conversation is done. "Ah! The legendary three-flavor danish!" He puffed his cheeks happily.

"Oh! I almost forgot," he suddenly turned back to me, licking the sugar off his fingers. "We haven't yet discussed the matter of remuneration, have we?"

"Eh? You want me to pay you?!"

"Ahaha! Don't worry, it's not money that I want… I am not asking for anything important, really."

"…Nothing important? So, do you want me to buy you some pastries…?"

"Pastries that can satisfy my appetite are extremely important!" He shook his head so vigorously I could almost hear the noise it was making.

"Um… so, what…?" I tilted my head in confusion.

"You see, I want you to let me do you a little," replied Kamishiro-kun with a big smile on his face.

"Do… eh? What?"

"Wasn't my voice clear enough? I said I want you to let me do you," he answered clearly, still smiling his wide smile.

"Oh, I see! You don't mean anything dirty, right? Sorry, sorry – I got confused for a second. You said it was nothing important, after all, didn't you?" I scratched my head in embarrassment, but Kamishiro-kun returned a surprised look.

"So you put that much value on your own body, sister? That sure is a shocking revelation!"

"No, it's me who's shocked! In more ways than one!" I instinctively covered my face with my hands. Then, I peeked at Kamishiro-kun through my fingers and asked again. "S…So, by 'doing', you really do mean…?"

"Despite my looks, I have more sexual appetite than most men! Besides, it's a given in spy movies that the hero gets the girl after it's all over, and you have just the kind of lewd face that would make any man horny!" Kamishiro-kun puffed his chest in pride.

"That's not something you should puff your chest at!"

"Should I puff something else? In that case, how about you puff your chest, sister? Go on, it wouldn't hurt to try! C'mon, push out that plump bosom of yours! Hee hee hee…"

I could only shudder at his wicked smile, full of hidden intentions.

"U…Um… where did that pure, innocent boy disappear to…?"

"Hee Hee hee… Anyway, I am looking forward to dealing with this incident in more ways than one. I have just one request. Please stop taking baths from now on. I much prefer dirty bodies, if you know what I mean."

"There's really nothing left of your previous personality, is there…?" It was even more difficult than usual, hearing such words come out of this young boy's mouth.

"Well, then," ignoring my perplexion Kamishiro-kun clapped his hands loudly. "It seems we're in agreement regarding the remuneration, so it's time for me to begin!"

He jogged down to the door and waved his hand innocently. "See you later!" he shouted as if he was a small child going out to play, and then ran out of the lab.

"W…Wait a second…! I never agreed to anything…!"

The door slammed, stopping my call before it could reach its destination.

"I… never agreed to anything…" I muttered fruitlessly to myself as I sat down on the bed, exhausted. "B..But… it was only a verbal agreement…" I'm not even sure such a one sided agreement can really be called an agreement. I mean, no one asked him to come and stick his neck into my troubles, right? Furthermore, "doing me"? That was obviously entirely one sided! No feminist group is going to stay quiet if someone gets away with something like this!

And that's why –

– it really has nothing to do with me.

"Yep. I should just ignore it. It's best to just ignore it." I lay down on the bed, muttering in desperation, when suddenly –

I heard the lab's door opening again. I thought Kamishiro-kun might have heard my mutterings and came back, so I rose up in panic, but –

My heart jumped at the sight of the slender, fair-skinned man at the door.

"Ah! Matsuda-kuuuuuuun!" I jumped like a sprinter straight into his chest. "You're late! I've been waiting for so long…!"

The body I was embracing was awfully stiff.

"Huh? Is something wrong?"

"I should ask you the same thing… don't you want to continue our conversation from before…?"

"…Eh? What conversation?" I had no clue what he was talking about. I had already forgotten it.

But I didn't care.

I don't know what happened before. As long as Matsuda-kun is here, everything is fine.

"Did we talk about something before…?" I tilted my head and then buried my face deep inside his chest. "Purrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr…" My head remained buried in that chest for a while. I thought he would chastise me for getting him dirty – but instead, he finally said two unexpected words.

"I'm sorry…"

"Eh?", I raised my head in surprise. "What… are you sorry about?"

Matsuda-kun stared at my face for a short while, and then coughed a small cough.

"No, it's fine if you don't remember. But in any case, I'm sorry," he said, bashfully turning his face away. I didn't understand exactly what he was saying – but for some reason my chest tightened with deep emotions replacing the thunderous beating of my heart. I buried my face deep in his chest again.

And as I stand there, swallowed inside his chest, I start forgetting.

All the dirt and filth that clung to the inside of my body crumbles into nothingness, leaving nothing but a pure, empty

feeling. Nothing matters except this very moment, right now.

I'm a little worried about his sudden apology, but even that is not such a big deal compared to this moment's happiness.

Right now. This very moment. That's the only important thing in the world.

I don't know about anything but this moment. Nothing exists for me except this moment. This moment won't even turn into a memory.

And that's why I have to treasure this moment's happiness.

"…By the way, what happened to the rope?" I suddenly heard Matsuda-kun's voice from somewhere above my head.

"…What rope?"

"You don't even remember how you escaped that knot?"

"No, I'm sorry…"

"I really can't leave you alone for a second, can I…"

"I'm sorry…"

Matsuda-kun shook his head and sighed, but his face had a happy expression on it.

"By the way… it's starting to hurt."

"Oh, c'mon… just a little longer…" I pleaded like a spoiled child. Matsuda-kun gave up with a sigh and then slowly let his body relax.

As I felt his body growing softer, I was immersed in a feeling of satisfaction and achievement, as if at that moment I could grasp the entire world inside my fist.

– This is my world.
– This alone is my world.

I closed my eyes, a feeling of euphoria flooding over me. I could hear the beating of his heart inside his chest. That constant beat was the final blessing for me, the girl who has just gotten everything she ever wanted inside her hands.

"The parade…" whispered Matsuda-kun suddenly.

"…Hm? Did you say something?" I replied, keeping my eyes closed.

"Somehow… the parade is growing louder again outside…"

I tried listening, but–

Thump, thump.

I couldn't hear anything but the beating of his heart.

– There's no one here except for me and Matsuda-kun.
– Nothing other than that has anything to do with me.

And right now –

– There wasn't even anything left to say anymore.

I spent some time buried in my beloved Matsuda-kun's chest. Then, I reluctantly parted with my beloved Matsuda-kun and returned to my room that didn't have my beloved Matsuda-kun in it. I thought of my beloved Matsuda-kun as I took off my shoes, I whispered my beloved Matsuda-kun's name as I climbed into bed, and then I drifted into sleep, where dreams of my beloved Matsuda-kun awaited me.

That's all there is to it.

Nothing else has anything to do with me anymore.

CHAPTER 13 - 14

The courtyard at Hope's Peak Academy's eastern quarter, deep at night.

The lights from the surrounding facilities were long gone. Only the street lamps, installed at fixed intervals, still dimly illuminated the darkness.

In front of the clock tower on the edge of the courtyard stood a teenage girl, alone. She narrowed her eyes and looked at the clock above her head.

"He should be here soon," she whispered.

The girl was waiting for someone.

When she first contacted the man, he coldly refused to meet her, insisting that it wasn't necessary. But once she'd procured documents concerning shady deals in his past, she found him much more open to the suggestion. It wasn't hard – after all, she made her livelihood discovering people's secrets. In fact, she thought this one had given up a little too easily. What else was he hiding…?

– Fame is a fickle food…
– You work so hard to get it, and all it gets you is your freedom lost…

The man she was waiting for was a member of Hope's Peak Academy's steering committee.

There was a reason she had to meet a member of the committee. There was something she had to ask directly, whatever the cost. There was a certain truth that the committee were earnestly trying to hide. A truth even her client – Hope's Peak Academy's headmaster – most likely did not know. The only avenue of investigation was to question a committee member directly.

She had come to that important realization only a few short days after setting out on her investigation. Her formidable talent led her to it.

Her name was Kyouko Kirigiri.

She was a student in Hope's Peak Academy's 78th class, and bore the title of "Super High-school Level Detective".

And right now, she was employed by Hope's Peak's headmaster to investigate a certain incident.

"He sure is late…" she whispered, looking up at the clock tower once more.

Five minutes late.

– I should have asked him to be strictly on time…

The wrinkles on her forehead deepened. But the moment she lowered her eyes from the clock, they disappeared. She saw a figure of a man in the distance.

The figure glanced around, seemingly on guard, then proceeded slowly toward where she was standing. His features slowly became clearer. He was an elderly man wearing a pitch-black suit and a matching pitch-black necktie, as if he was on the way back from a funeral. His grizzled hair was unnaturally stiff with pomade, and seemed almost artificial.

As the man came closer, his face also revealed itself. His brow was covered with deep wrinkles that seemed to be chiseled directly into his skull. The sunken eyes below them glared at Kyouko with a disgusted expression.

The distance between the two narrowed, and finally, when there were only three meters separating them, the man stopped.

"…Was it you who called me here?" The man opened his small, straight mouth and raised the question in a severe tone of voice. "What is it you wa –"

But, his words were cut short.

Something absurd, something completely out of place, came falling down from the sky –

– and both the man and his words –

– were flattened by it.

Kyouko felt as if the scene before her was a stop motion animation –

– as though she was witnessing a series of ridiculous tableaus.

The school desk that came flying down from the sky hit the man directly on the head.

The man's body twisted from the impact, and then collapsed. The desk struck the ground and then bounced back into the air in recoil. At that point, another desk came flying down from above. It smashed into the fallen man's back, bending his body like a trampled ragdoll. Then, yet another falling desk twisted his neck unnaturally. The man's face showed no sign of surprise. It was stuck in the same expression he had when he talked to Kyouko. Then, several more flying desks hid his body, making a huge cloud of dust as they hit the ground.

An overdue intense crashing noise finally registered in Kyouko's ears. At the same time, a desk came shooting out from inside the cloud of dust, grazed her hair, and landed behind her, revolving like a spinning top.

It was a freakish development.

A development with no rhyme or reason.

The man who moments ago stood in front of Kyouko had been crushed by a large number of falling school desks as soon as he opened his mouth. It all took place in the span of a few seconds.

It took Kyouko only a brief moment to regain her senses. The dust cloud was still rising in the air when she took off running up to the desk pile. There was already a deep-red puddle next to the man, who was now buried under the rubble. Dark liquid seeped from his eyes, nose and ears.

Kyouko's mind quickly changed course. She turned her head to look above her.

A vague silhouette stood atop the school building, slowly coming into focus. It was a human figure, illuminated by moonlight from behind. The figure brandished something above its head… and then threw it.

It was a pipe chair, and it was flying down straight towards Kyouko.

She jumped aside, dodging the chair's trajectory, and leaped into the school building. Yet another crashing noise came from behind her. She assumed a low posture as she ran through the building's corridors, and then continued to run up the stairs without stopping to catch her breath. At that moment, she didn't care at all that she had just been targeted. She was running purely for the sake of the clue, in an adrenaline rush that erased any sense of danger from her mind.

Then, in no time at all, she reached the landing at the top floor and found the remains of a padlock lying on the floor in front of the door that led to the roof.

– This school should really consider buffing up security.

She grabbed the doorknob, muttering cynically. The feeling of cold metal reached her fingertips. She squeezed the knob and pushed. The door opened easily and noiselessly.

She immediately felt the strong, cold night wind blowing past her body.

She took a single cautious step into the doorway, and quickly looked around the roof, dimly illuminated by starlight. There was no one there.

She walked around the concrete floor, thoroughly checking the area near the door and every other place where a person could conceivably be hiding in the shadows. Nevertheless – she couldn't find anybody.

– I just missed them.

A feeling of despondency assailed her, and she leaned her back on the iron fence surrounding the roof. Then, she looked up at the sky and quietly grumbled to herself.

"This is why I hate missing person cases…"

Suddenly, a cold shiver ran past her back. Something wasn't right. She quickly turned over, pushed her body over the railing and looked down into the courtyard. Her face caught the cold night wind, and her expression quickly turned grave serious.

She could see the wreckage of school desks and pipe chairs near the clock tower. But there was something missing.

The body that should have been there – wasn't.

Kyouko's teeth chattered from the cold as she pulled her cell phone from an inner pocket. Just as she was about to push the call button, a hint of hesitation appeared on her face.

Nevertheless, her finger soon pushed the button.

After a couple of rings, she heard a man's voice.

"Are you free right now?" Kyouko asked, skipping a greeting. "There's something I want to report directly. I'm coming over."

It was a few minutes after Kyouko Kirigiri had disappeared from the roof.

Bzzzzzzzzzzzt. A strange sound, as if the very air was being torn, echoed through the east quarter's courtyard.

"Zap! Zap! Taser-gun!" exclaimed the high school girl, touting a pistol-shaped object high over her head. Her eyes were focused on the two guards lying in a pile on the floor, collapsed. They were both lying face down, and each had a small, thin needle sticking out of their back. A wire ran from each needle to the pistol in the girl's hand.

"Take that!" she cried and pulled the trigger.

Bzzzzzzzzzzzt.

The bodies of the two men, who were already unconscious, shook and spasmed along with the violent noise.

"…Ha ha!"

An ecstatic expression appeared on the girl's face as she watched them.

Junko Enoshima –

She had no makeup on, looked as if she had just woken up from sleep, and kept yawning big yawns. The pistol she held in her hand was a taser gun, a powerful self-defense weapon. It was a type of a stun gun - by shooting some target with a needle connected to a wire, she could send an electric current through the target's body. It wasn't originally strong enough to kill a person, but since she'd modified it to send a stronger current it wouldn't be so strange if someone did die.

A despair-inducing self-defense weapon.

One might say it made her unbeatable.

Junko Enoshima continued playing with the taser gun for a short while, but soon grew tired of it. She pulled the wires

away with her bare hands, and threw them into a plastic bag. Then, she nonchalantly dumped the bag into a nearby trash can.

"Well, then. I think that took care of every annoying person in my way. It seems that Little Miss Kindaichi also disappeared to who knows where… Upupu… Does that mean I have the place all to myself?"

She let out a theatrical sigh of relief, and walked majestically across the plaza. Her destination was the clock tower. She didn't attempt to hide herself at all. Quite the opposite - she exhibited a sense of presence that seemed to scream at people to look at her. It also had the sinister suggestion that by doing so they might end up dead.

"That said, I never expected Little Miss Conan to stick her nose into my business. It must be that pesky headmaster's meddling… But, my plans for this scenario don't include her at all, so what am I to do? I mean, it is interesting to have her around, but it's also possible she'll be a real hindrance after I went through all that effort to – Hey, waitwaitwaitwaitwait?"

She stopped abruptly, as if about to trip forward, and stared at the wreckage of school desks and pipe chairs in front of her. The moment she saw it, the cruel smile that was plastered on her face disappeared.

"…The body isn't here," she spat out. "Again…? This sure is despair-inducing… As despair-inducing as all your dreams crumbling down…"

Nevertheless, there was a smile on her face.

Smiling, she kicked the pipe chair that was lying on the ground near her feet. It didn't seem like a very powerful kick, but the chair flew a few meters, hit a street lamp that was in its way, and shot off into the air like a ping-pong ball.

Then, when the sound of the clash's echo disappeared from the plaza –

– Junko Enoshima's figure was already gone, vanished like a shadow.

CHAPTER 15

– What was that noise?

Kyouko Kirigiri instinctively stopped moving. She thought she'd heard a sound like a bell clanging, but when she listened attentively the corridor was as still and silent as ever.

– Did I imagine it?

Usually, she would have stopped and investigated until she could tell for sure, but right now she had something far more important to do. And so, she took off quickly toward her destination.

Kyouko walked briskly down a corridor of Hope's Peak Academy's staff building, a place students are normally forbidden to enter. The sound of her footsteps echoed coldly through the dim corridor. There was no sign of people in the staff building this late at night - she hadn't passed anyone on the way here, and she most likely wouldn't pass anyone going forward.

She reached her destination in no time at all.

A plaque reading "Headmaster's Office" adorned the door in front of her eyes. Kyouko glared at it for a moment, and

then pushed the door open without knocking.

"You're already here. That was fast," said Jin Kirigiri, who was sitting at a desk deep inside the office. He was smiling.

Kyouko surveyed the room quickly, as was her habit when entering an unfamiliar place. Her first and only impression was "it's dirty." Cardboard boxes and documents were piled everywhere without rhyme or reason.

"…I've been too busy since we moved here, so I haven't had time to put things in order," said Kirigiri, having noticed where Kyouko was looking. Nevertheless, Kyouko's reply was surly and indifferent. She moved straight on to the subject at hand, indicating no interest in small talk.

"I just came from meeting a member of the steering committee, but someone got in our way." Kirigiri was about to say something in surprise, but Kyouko quickly continued as if to say it was not yet time for such a reaction. "He was killed. In front of my eyes."

"…K…Killed?"

"But, his body disappeared soon after that…"

"…Disappeared?" Despite only managing to repeat her words, Kirigiri's face grew deeply concerned. Nevertheless, Kyouko didn't seem to take notice, and continued speaking in the same indifferent tone.

"But, don't you think that's strange? They killed him as if trying to show off in front of me, and then they took the body away, like they wanted to hide it… If they wanted to show off, what purpose does hiding the body serve? I have a bad feeling about this." Kyouko seemed to be getting more and more passionate as she went on, and spoke faster and faster. "Furthermore, didn't another committee member go missing yesterday? He may also be in danger. We should find a way to contact and warn him. No, not just him - the whole committee is also –"

"W…Wait a moment!" Kirigiri couldn't take it anymore, and rose up from his chair. "A…Are you sure he was dead…?"

Kyouko said nothing, but her grim face was all the answer he needed. Kirigiri felt an intense feeling of exhaustion taking over his body and sank back into his chair. "Why would… such a thing…?" He heard Kyouko letting out a long, slow sigh in response to his question.

"…I'm not sure about the hiding, but I have a guess as to why he was killed."

"Y…You do?" Kirigiri slapped his hands on the desk, and looked energized again. "Tell me. Why?"

Watching him, Kyouko felt a sense of disappointment washing over her. Her emotion was reflected in her eyes, which seemed to be asking why he couldn't even figure that out on his own. Worse, he didn't even notice that.

"…Please. Tell me."

Kyouko sighed another deep sigh and answered quietly. "Making that big of a show when killing someone can only mean it's a warning… and if that's the case, killing a member of the steering committee is surely in response to 'that incident'."

Jin Kirigiri gulped loudly. "So you… know about that already? About the Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History…"

"To a certain extent."

Contrasting Kyouko's calm answer, Kirigiri's face turned sour.

"I see…" he spat out, and slowly leaned back into his chair. Then, after blinking several times in an attempt to regain his composure, he asked her another question.

"Are you saying he was killed because we are covering up the existence of that incident?"

"No, there's more to it than that." Kyoko shook her head lightly. "The steering committee hasn't just been covering up the existence of the incident. They've been hiding something else. Something important. I think that's why he was killed."

Kirigiri's expression turned thoughtful in an instant. Then, he whispered quietly. "Perhaps… is it because the committee knows the identity of the culprit and are harboring them?"

Kyouko's eyebrows raised slightly in reaction. "You… know about that?" For the first time since she entered the room, her eyes met Kirigiri's. "I never thought you knew about the culprit conspiracy. I didn't think you'd give me this job if you did… But… I guess you're in on it after all." Her words carried a hint of anger.

"No, that's not it." Kirigiri shook his head, flustered. "I was never told about the culprit, or the plan to harbor them. The committee decided that all on their own. I didn't hear about it from them - I did my own little investigation."

Kyouko's frown grew deeper. "You… did your own investigation?"

"That's not that strange, is it?" Kirigiri smiled a bitter smile. "I can manage that much when my mind's on it. I mean, I do have the blood of a detective family running through my –"

"Enough!" Kyouko's voice suddenly rose. Kirigiri raised his head in surprise, and found her glaring at him. She wasn't even trying to hide the anger boiling up inside her, and it was reflected in her eyes. She wasn't angry at her employer or her headmaster. She was angry at her detested father.

"Don't even dare joking about that!"

And that's why –

"I'm sorry."

– He had no choice but to apologize.

"…That was thoughtless of me." He bowed his head deeply.

His circumstances didn't matter. His own feelings didn't matter. From her point of view, he was simply a man who abandoned his family. That much was unquestionable. He didn't want to make any excuses. It's not like he could, anyway.

But, perhaps, some day, he could at least convey his own feelings to her –

– No, those are just selfish thoughts.

"…Forget it." He raised his head at her voice. She was leaning on a bookshelf in the corner of the room, and her expression was back to its calm self. "We've gotten off topic." Her voice was cool and composed.

"I'm sorry, you're right…" He let out a deep sigh. But, just as he was about to let his attention relax, two words assaulted him, as if in a surprise attack. They were cold, sharp words that seemed to pierce the air.

"It was Izuru Kamukura… wasn't it?"

Kirigiri reacted instinctively. His eyes, his fingertips, his breath… Kyouko did not miss his reaction.

"…So it was…"

His entire body was arrested by the look she gave him. He remembered that look. No, he couldn't just remember it - she had the eyes of a detective family. The eyes he hated and feared. The eyes that could pierce anyone's inner thoughts, creep through their minds and leave nothing unrevealed.

His own daughter giving him this awe-inspiring look… Kirigiri's frown loosened, just a little.

– As expected from a heir to the Kirigiri family!
– Such outstanding talent!

"…Is something funny?" Kyouko asked, watching his face, as if taking him to task.

"No, I was just admiring you." The smile hasn't left Kirigiri's face. "I instructed you to find Izuru Kamukura, and in such a short time you have not only discovered the existence of the Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History, but also guessed correctly that Izuru Kamakura was responsible for it… That is amazing." He spoke fast, in excitement.

"Well, then. How about you tell me the rest? Who is Izuru Kamukura? I can't even tell if it's a man or a woman by that name alone…"

Kirigiri shook his head. "I told you before. I can't tell you that." The smile disappeared from his face.

"…I see. Fine, then." Kyouko was quickly getting ready to leave, as if to say she'd find out herself regardless. She looked at her feet and continued in her disinterested tone. "…But, I don't understand this at all. Why would you ask me to find Kamukura for you if you know he's the culprit? Aren't you trying to cover up this incident? If so, you should just let the committee shelter Kamukura, and do nothing."

"No, I can't just leave it up to them."

"Oh?" Kyouko's mouth twisted unnaturally. "So, you don't trust them either?"

"No, that's not it." Kirigiri's voice turned cold. "It's just that I don't think they know what they're doing. I think… they're making a big mistake."

"A mistake?"

"They think that if they can cover up this incident, it's all over… But I don't think that's true."

Kyouko listened carefully to Kirigiri's explanation without interjecting.

"That incident is not yet over. I feel like something is still going on somewhere out there… I hope it's just my imagination, but if it isn't, this may turn into something we can't undo. That's why I must hear what Izuru Kamukura has to say. But, the committee isn't revealing where Kamukura is. They don't trust me."

"……"

Something bothered Kyouko. It had less to do with what he was saying, and more with his demeanor as he was telling her about his fear that the incident was far from over. His tone of voice and gestures were certainly grave, but that was not all. She felt just a tiny hint of a different emotion hidden in them.

She suddenly remembered her grandfather.

Kyouko's grandfather, Jin Kirigiri's father, was still the head of the Kirigiri family, on active duty as a detective. She remembered her first accomplishment as a detective. She was officially acting as an assistant on the case, but was successful beyond anyone's imagination. Her grandfather, being her guardian at the time, had been observing her closely. She remembered him narrowing his eyes without saying a word, the expression on his face going far beyond simple joy or excitement.

She thought her father's expression now resembled her grandfather's expression then.

But she didn't dare say a word. It would be an insult to her grandfather, who she revered.

"…Is something wrong?"

The question made her realise she's been quiet for a while.

"It's nothing." Kyouko pulled herself together, softly brushing away a strand of hair. "Fine. I understand why you asked me to search for Kamukura now. In short, you couldn't do it yourself without drawing the committee's attention." Then, she pointed her piercing eyes toward Kirigiri again. "But, are you sure it was a good idea to confide in me?"

Kirigiri's expression turned worried. "…What do you mean?"

"I told you from the very beginning, didn't I? The steering committee is being targeted because they're sheltering the incident's culprit, which means…"

"…The culprit is someone who is searching for Kamukura –" Kirigiri suddenly realised what he was saying, and a stiff smile appeared on his face. "In that case, what you're trying to say is that I am a suspect."

"That's right. Although I already know it's not you." Kyouko folded her arms in front of her chest. "Right after the body disappeared, I made a phone call to this room… You answered straight away, so unfortunately, you have an alibi."

"'Unfortunately'? That's a bit much, isn't it?" Kirigiri's stiff smile turned into a bitter one.

"Furthermore, don't you think you have other reasons to worry? When I find Izuru Kamukura… what if I decide to call the police before coming to you?"

"No, I'm not worried about that at all." Kirigiri answered, as if mocking the suggestion. "Much as the law is important to the police, the most important thing to a detective is the client. As long as you are a Super High-school Level Detective, you will not break our deal." Even if you really detest your employer, he thought to himself.

"Is that why you hired me? You thought it would be bad if I came sniffing about the incident on my own, so you thought you'd keep me quiet by giving me a job?" Her words were tinted with emotion. Kyouko herself felt that. She immediately regretted saying them.

"If that's what my words implied, I apologize. The only reason I hired you is because I needed your talent. I had no

ulterior motives."

He chose his words carefully. It was clear that he was worried, and that made Kyouko even angrier. She was also mad at herself for letting him get to her. She thought she had put it all behind her - she wasn't supposed to feel anything for her father anymore. She wasn't even supposed to resent him. That's why she accepted the job - It was supposed to be just like any other case. So why was she choosing such sharp words every time she spoke? It was like –

– I'm like a spoiled child, looking for attention.

"I've had enough of this idle chatter," she said in a strained voice, trying to rid the thought from her head. "In any case, we can't have any more victims. I think it's a good idea for you to warn the rest of the committee members. Tell them if they continue to harbor Izuru Kamukura, it's likely more people are going to end up dead."

"Yes, of course…" They both knew the committee were unlikely to listen, but neither of them said it out loud. They both knew it would be useless to mention it.

"…I'll be going now." Kyouko turned her back on Kirigiri without giving him another look. She was on her way to the door when an unexpected voice came from behind her back.

"This job turned out much more dangerous than I imagined…"

Kyouko stopped in her tracks. "So?" She turned her head back. "I am a detective. Heir to the Kirigiri family."

"…I thought that's what you'd say."

Kyouko sensed those words were leading to another unwanted emotion, and started moving quickly to the door again. When she reached for the doorknob, her father spoke again behind her.

"The preparatory school's 'parade' is growing more radical by the day…" His voice was unusually tense. "I feel the timing is too perfect. It can't be unrelated to that incident. What I'm trying to say is…" Kirigiri cleared his throat, and changed to a natural tone of voice.

"…Be careful."

He sounded like a father talking to his daughter before she went out for the evening. Nevertheless, Kyouko's reaction was a blunt one. That is to say, she didn't react at all. She just kept silent as she left the headmaster's office.

After hearing the door close loudly, Kirigiri let out a deep sigh and leaned back into his chair, but his face showed a hint of a smile.

– That truly is one incredible talent she has.

He whispered those words inside his heart, and the smile on his face grew wider.

After leaving the headmaster's office, Kyouko walked back through the corridors as fast as when she arrived. Her face was emotionless.

Then, without changing her expression, she suddenly whispered.

"…He didn't have to say that. I know already."

The whisper only she herself could hear soon vanished into the air. And then, she herself vanished too, deep into the dark corridors.

CHAPTER 16

And so, after everything that's happened, I, Ryouko Otonashi, and Yasuke Matsuda-kun made the decision to drop out and put Hope's Peak Academy behind us.

Right now we are waiting for our flight at the airport lobby. Soon, we will both board an airplane and embark on our trip to America, the land of the free. I have finally realized what's important. As long as I have Matsuda-kun in my world, I don't need to fuss over such trifling matters as Hope's Peak Academy. I have no obligation to participate in this irrational story. If you happen to be interested in what happens next, by all means - go ask someone else. We're busy. After we get to America, we're going to develop a new species of corn at a corn plantation, and then go to NASA and work on relocating to the moon. "Hey, Matsuda-kun!" I say, turning towards Matsuda-kun who is already hard at work growing corn under the seat next to me. "Hey, we're not at the plantation yet! Isn't this too early?" "Don't interfere! I'm busy planting the Saibamen!" he replies while planting some seeds in the ground. "Y…You can't, Matsuda-kun! Saibamen require richer soil to grow! Nappa-sama is going to be soupset!" But he is not listening to my advice and bang bang bang bang–

I opened my eyes.

I raised my body up wearily, and took a look around the room. A beige carpet. A small dresser. Empty bookshelves. Here and there, small notes reading "This is my room" were pasted on the wall. Since they were there I knew that this was, indeed, my room.

I gave a sigh of relief – and then realized I didn't have time for that.

Bang bang bang bang bang. Someone was knocking violently on my door, as if trying to bring it down.

"I…I'm coming, just a minute…"

Bang bang ba-ba-bang!
Bang-ba-bang-bang! Bang-ba-bang-bang!

Not only didn't they wait, they also started knocking in a strange rhythm. I sulked, crawled out of bed, and then realized I had been sleeping with my shoes on. "Hm?" I thought as I removed them, picked up the notebook that was lying next to the pillow, and rushed to the door.

"…Who is it?" I unlocked the door, then opened it softly.

"Yoooohooooo!" A blond girl in loud makeup peeked vigorously through the gap.

"Waaah!" I reacted in surprise.

"Hey, hey! How much longer were you planning to sleep? It's noon already, y'know! What are you, a giant?!"

"…Huh?"

"Oh, wait. Sleepy was a dwarf, wasn't he. Sorry, my bad!"

I opened my notebook to check who this mysterious person who didn't seem to care about the proper way to start a conversation was, but–

"Oh? Have you forgotten about me? Let me tell you, then. My name's Junko Enoshima-chan! AKA 'Super High-school Level Fashion Girl'!"

Junko Enoshima, huh? I hurried and looked for memories of her in my notebook. Soon, alarms started going off inside my head. That's right… This is the girl who called herself a murderer and tried to get me involved in something I absolutely mustn't get involved in!

"G…Go awaaaaaaaay!" I screamed as if my brain was coming to a boil. I closed the door in a panic, but she had already forced her foot through the gap in the style of a door-to-door salesman, and stopped me from doing so.

"Oh? Are you, perhaps, thinking you can run away? That kind of attitude's just gonna hurt my feelings, y'know."

"I…I don't care! Just go awaaay!" I used my entire body's strength in an attempt to push the door close, but it didn't budge.

"Ding dong! Eureka, I got it! You think I'm a strange girl, don't you? You think there's a screw loose in my head, don't you? Could it be you don't even want to hear what I have to say? Is your conviction that strong? In that case, BIG SHOCK!" Enoshima-san opened her eyes wide and spread both her arms forward as she said the last two words.

"W…What the…?!"

"Eh? Don't you think it's funny? I was so sure I could make a fad out of this expression… BIG SHOCK!"

She seems to live in a different dimension than me – I'm the one who should be in Big Shock right now!

"…No, that's not it. I meant, what do you want from me?!"

"Well, we can't stay here at the door all day, so… 'scuse me, coming in!" She pushed the door open with what seemed to be the strength of a hundred men, and invaded my room.

"Noooooooooo!" I tried to escape deeper into the room but Enoshima-san managed to reach and grab me by the back of my neck. "….fugyuu!"

"This isn't the time for you to be running away, is it? Aren't I the grand thief who stole away your precious notebooks? Don't you hate me? Don't you just despise me?"

"I…I don't care anymore… I don't need those old memories anymore! I mean, it's not like I can remember any of them!"

I struggled violently and somehow managed to shake her hand off. Then, I jumped into my bed as fast as I could,

covered my entire body, head to toe, with the blanket, and yelled a plea. "Just leave me alone! Don't involve me in whatever it is you do! It has nothing to do with me!"

Then–

"Oh? So you're going to lock yourself in your own little world…" I heard Enoshima-san's indifferent voice through the blanket. "But, that would mean you're going to just let Yasuke Matsuda die… are you really okay with that?"

In a second, my sunken emotions poured out all at once, and spread all the way to my chest.

"W…What did you just say?! Are you going to do something to Matsuda-kun?!" I shot like a bullet from under the blanket and hurried toward Enoshima-san.

Then, something unexpected happened.

Smiling, Junko Enoshima-san… hugged me.

"…Huh?"

I was still dumbfounded when she began whispering in my ear.

"Yes, that's good. You should hate me so much you'd want to kill me. The more you despise me, the more despair-inducing this story's ending is going to get… and that would be perfect."

"W…Wait…! Let me go…!"

"Hate me, despise me, fight me… Tear off that shell of yours, and let your true self reveal itself. This is not the time to lock yourself inside your own world. Let us give birth to a new you. It may hurt right now, but there's no need to worry. These are just birth pains. When you overcome them, it would finally be time to say happy birthday to your true self…!"

I took a bite into Enoshima-san's ear.

"Owowowowowow!"

As she faltered, I jumped out of her grip. "G…Give me a break! Why do I have to get involved with something like that…?! It has nothing to do with me!"

"Ha ha! Whether you have or don't have anything to do with it has nothing to do with it!" She stroked her bitten ear and turned to me, an ecstatic smile on her face. "Traffic accidents, natural disasters, wars… do you even realize how many people in this world lose their lives to things that have nothing to do with them?"

"B…But…"

"It's just the same! Well, at least it's the same to me!"

I started praying. Dear god, please listen to my prayer. Please drop a meteorite on this girl's head right now. If you do, I will revere you for the rest of my life, right after Matsuda-kun!

"Besides, you have everything to do with it. You only say you don't because you simply don't remember."

"…Huh?" My prayer was instantly swallowed by intense bewilderment. "What… has something to do with me?"

"Hm? It's obvious, isn't it?" Enoshima-san arbitrarily lowered her voice and declared. "The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History. You are deeply involved with it."

I quickly turned to consult Ryouko Otonashi's Memory Notebook – but Enoshima-san grabbed my hand.

"L…Let me go…!"

"Did you really think the things you can't remember are worthless and meaningless? If you did, you really are a dummy." She smiled a faint smile and drew closer. "You see, it doesn't matter how much you forget. Your actions are not going to disappear. Their effects are still felt right now in that world you've forgotten about."

"W…What are –?"

"What, did it never cross your mind? Did you never imagine decisions you had made ended up hurting and tormenting people?"

"T…That's not…"

"It's a cruel world out there, but it's the one we live in. People are intertwined in ways much more complex than you have ever imagined. A single person's actions may save the entire world… A single person's actions may cause a chain of despair that throws the world into chaos… Heh heh, isn't that amazing? Truly, this is a world worthy of being lived in!"

It was such worthless, silly logic that I felt embarrassed just listening to it.

But… there was something there.

Somewhere deep inside my heart I found myself agreeing with her words.

"…Do you get it now? In that case, let's return to the conversation's starting point." Enoshima-san crossed her arms. "I'm going to talk fast, so play attention. You most certainly are involved with The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History, but I assume your next question is 'exactly how am I involved?', isn't it?"

"T…This is going too quickly…"

"I'll tell you, then!" She ignored me and continued. "That is, I can't really tell you."

"Which is it?!" I wished she would at least be clear on this point.

"I mean, it's boring if I tell you right now… at least, that's what I think. That's why you should find out on your own exactly what's your involvement with the incident is… I think that's the kind of story this is."

"F…Find out on my own…" Does she think this is a game?!

"You're probably asking yourself if I think this is a game, but I'm not gonna tell you either way. That's the kind of story this is. But, this is the perfect time for me to add that I'm going to give you a hint. That's the kind of story this is, you see."

I gave up. Her speech was completely absurd. I couldn't even understand the point she was trying to make.

"Which means… what, exactly?"

"I just told you, didn't I? I'm gonna give you a hint!", Enoshima-san looked offended. "By the way, once I give you the hint my role here is over. After I give it, I'm going to go away without saying another word."

"Y…You're going to go away? You are? Really?!" I thrust my body forward instinctively. I felt energy like I've never felt before taking over my body. "Then tell me! And then go away!"

"…F…Fine, it's not like my feelings are hurt or anything!" Enoshima-san's lips trembled as if she was shocked at my unexpected joy. "By the way, this is important so make sure you write everything down."

"Sure, sure! I got it, so just get on with it!" As I pressed her, I took out my notebook. She coughed a little cough and raised her voice as if making an important announcement.

"Tah-daaaah! Here we go! This hint is all about 'Junko Enoshima-chan's goals'!" She made a V sign with her right hand. "There are two such goals!" She dropped one finger from her V and left her index finger pointing up. "Goal number one! To thoroughly crush down this school's symbol of hope, Izuru Kamukura!" Then, she raised her middle finger. "Goal number two!"

After a short pause for dramatic effect, she raised her voice to its maximum volume and continued.

"…To kill the beloved darling Yasuke Matsuda!"

I heard a thump and realized I dropped my notebook on the floor. My body stiffened. I couldn't even speak.

– To kill the beloved darling Yasuke Matsuda.

Those incomprehensible words sprouted buds of fear, anxiety and confusion inside my body. The seeds grew and stretched in a single instant, fixing my body in place. I felt as if I was cast in plaster, unable to move even a single finger.

Enoshima-san watched my suddenly silent figure intently for a brief moment and then –

"……"

Everything was silent. Her mouth was a straight line, tightly closed, as if declaring her intention not to speak anymore. And then, after standing there quietly for a few seconds, Enoshima-san made a small goodbye wave with her hand and left my room.

The moment I heard the door closing my body lost every bit of its energy and I crouched, as if struck down by anemia.

"W…What the…?" My voice squeezed from deep within my throat, sounding like the chirps of a dying bird.
"M…Matsuda-kun? She wants to…?"

– Kill?

Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill.
Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill.
Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill.

The cruel word took over my entire world. "S…She can't… she definitely can't…"

My head was hot. Hot enough to make my hair rise.

"She can't do… such a thing…"

My chest was also hot. Intense burning emotion made my heart explode.

And then – something strange happened.

Magma-like heat boiled up deep inside my stomach, gradually swelled inside my body and exploded when it reached my chest. It escaped my heart and reached every muscle in my body–

–I felt rejuvenated. Stimulated.

"I…! I CAN'T LET HER DO THIS!!!" I leaped out of the room and into the corridor, yelling. I ran like a bullet, in a fever I couldn't believe myself. The pages of Ryouko Otonashi's Memory Notebook fluttered in the wind.

As I listened to the flapping noise of my trusted partner, I screamed inside my heart.

– I will protect my own world!
– I will save Matsuda-kun!

I ran through the dormitory's corridors like a hurricane.

– Matsuda-kun, wait for me!
– I will be there soon!

Ryouko Otonashi is running. I am running – so I can become the saviour of my and Matsuda-kun's world.

But, at the time, I hadn't noticed yet.

I hadn't noticed that my frantically working towards a goal was itself the beginning of my despair.

I hadn't yet noticed this despair-inducing reality.

VOLUME 2

CHAPTER 1

"Yasuke-kun."

"What is it?"

"Heeey, Yasuke-kun."

"I said what is it?!"

"Why are you angry?"

"Are you for real? Because I spent my entire day trying to find a criminal! You should have said it was you who destroyed it all along! Why'd you lie about it?!"

"I didn't really lie about anything. I just didn't say mention it!"

"It's the same thing! Why did you do such a thing?!"

"It's because… you never leave your house anymore, Yasuke-kun…"

"…Huh?"

"I thought maybe if I made a sandcastle you'd come look. There's no sense in making them if you don't look at them…"

"It's none of your business…"

"…Yasuke-kun, why were you hiding?"

"Shut up."

"Don't you like people seeing you cry…?"

"I'll hit you!"

"You can't hit a girl, Yasuke-kun."

"You're just another dimwitted girl with no personality!"

"I… I won't cry… okay…"

"I'm not trying to make you cry!"

"I won't cry! Because the person who really wants to cry is Yasuke-kun!"

"W-What are you saying? I don't cry…"

"Why do you keep pretending to be strong?"

"I'm not trying to be strong!"

"… You don't have to pretend to be strong in front of me… I don't care if I'm a dimwitted girl with no personality…"

"……"

"Anyway, if I saw you crying I bet I'd like you more…"

"That's kinda gross…"

"It's fine if it's gross. Besides, I've decided something. Even if you hide, I'll always be by your side. You can't escape me."

"You sound like stalker."

"I'm not a stalker. I'm your lover."

"Since when were you my lover? Is that something you decided by yourself?"

"Hey, since we're lovers, I'll be with you when you're sad."

"I'm not really… sad…"

"There you go pretending to be strong again."

"I'm not pretending to be strong! I'm just not sad!!"

"Yasuke-kun…"

"In the end she didn't even remember who I am! She just figured I was just some kid she didn't care about! I couldn't even call her mum anymore in case she'd get scared, I had to pretend to be someone else's kid! I'm not gonna cry for her sake! Now that she's dead I've got a load off my shoulders! I don't have to be an actor in a play anymore!"

"But it was because of the disease…"

"I said it was unavoidable, didn't I? I'm sick of hearing it! The doctor was always saying that! The doctor didn't do anything! If he were really a doctor he would have cured my mum's disease"

"… He sounds like a phony."

"Hmmm… If I were a doctor, I would have cured her disease easily…"

"… Are you going to cry?"

"I said I don't cry!"

"… Don't worry. I'll never forget about you, Yasuke-kun."

"W-what… that's a weird thing to say suddenly…"

"It's not weird. I really mean it. Even if I forget everything else in this world, I'll absolutely remember you."

"If you do… forget, what will you do… ?"

"Then you'll cure me, Yasuke-kun. If you become a doctor, you'll be able to cure any disease I have, won't you?"

"Well… yeah, I guess…"

"And, if you forget, I'll remember you. But if I don't remember, we'll still be together forever! We'd spend our whole lives looking after each other!"

"I knew it, you really are a stalker, aren't you?"

"Anyway, we'll always be together! Hey, since we'll always be together, it's okay to do embarrassing things. It's okay to cry, you can cry forever."

"You… really are weird…"

"Ehehe, so have you given up?"

"… You won't laugh at me?"

"I won't laugh at you."

"… You won't try to comfort me?"

"I won't try to comfort you."

"… You won't tell anyone?"

"I don't have any friends to tell it to!"

"I don't have any friends either… Or any family."

For the first time in his life, Matsuda Yasuke cried in public.

CHAPTER 2

Hope's Peak Academy's east district.

The faculty building.

In the unpopular fourth floor's corridor, only two sets of footsteps could be heard. One set of footsteps belonged to the school physician. The other belonged to 'Super High School Level Neurologist', Matsuda Yasuke. The physician, with dark shadows cast over his face, led Matsuda, a depressing feeling floated in the atmosphere. Matsuda wore his usual dingy white shirt that fit him loosely, the hem of his shirt met his trousers and he wore a jacket of the top. It clung to his shoulders stiffly as he walked, most likely because he never wore it.

"… Ah, I really owe you one for this," said the physician walking ahead of him, Matsuda raised his head, "he's no where near my specialty… I was extremely troubled on what to do. So I appreciate your cooperation with this." He had a relieved sounding voice - Matsuda replied in an indifferent voice.

"Still, in the future you should talk to an expert about it. But, if you can't do that, come to me… That's all there is to it, right?"

"T-That's-" The physician choked back his words. Matsuda could not see his face from his position, but he could easily imagine the man in front of him looked concerned.

Did something happen?

Matsuda took some deep breaths to calm himself.

"…It's fine. I'm not going to use the excuse that I'm a student on you. No, instead I should be helping the experts more."

"I… I see… in any case, I owe you my thanks." The physician's face returned to normal. However, in turn Matsuda had only become more tense and irritated. He reminded himself to suppress his emotions.

Either way, there's no turning back.

So I can protect her I need to keep going on.

No, instead…I need to keep falling down…?

The physician continued to lead him around the corridor corner. Matsuda followed him - the atmosphere immediately changed. This part of the corridor was eerily silent, he felt the temperature rapidly drop. On one side of the corridor, every window was covered up by thick curtains. The other side was lined with a number of doors, on each door there was a darkly tinted small window. This corridor was longer than the last. The faculty building was exactly as Matsuda had imagined it would look like since he first learnt of its existence.

"…Usually, all the rooms are vacant." The physician abruptly started to explain. He may have sensed Matsuda's question.

So then, I suppose he means these rooms are only really used in an emergency.

He followed the physician, looking around absentmindedly. The physician who had been walking ahead of him stopped suddenly.

"… This is it." As he said that, he gestured to the door next to him. There wasn't anything unique about the door, in fact it was a miracle the man was able to identify the door. "Apparently all the equipment has already been delivered but… Can you really go by yourself? The principal had asked for two people…"

"It's fine." Matsuda replied flatly.

"No, but…" The physician hesitated. Matsuda had rendered his argument useless.

"The principle and the steering committee have given me full access, in their absence they have left it to me. Besides, it would make no difference if two people went. Actually it would probably affect the subject in a bad way. So, I ask of you to please leave the rest to me."

"Mhm" The physician looked subdued - He quickly gave up and nodded, not bothering to argue anymore. "I see. Well then, I'll leave it to you." The physician turned away from Matsuda and walked around the corner into the depths of the corridor.

After Matsuda watched the man walk away, he turned his gaze to the door in front of him. He slowly opened the door -behind it was a dimly lit, wide space. The first thing he noticed was the room was filled to the brim with various electronic devices. This place had more high tech equipment than the school's humble school hospital or the research facility.

Well, that's Hope's Peak Academy for you.

That was the impression the room before him gave Matsuda. However, he felt tense as he stepped foot into the room. The fluorescent lights over him seemed to be unreliable in comparison to the ones used in the classrooms, the window on the back wall was also covered in a thick hanging curtain, the overall lighting of the room was quite dark. Due to that, the light emitted from the electronic devices stood out more. In the centre of the room was a bed, surrounded by the shining lights.

Matsuda's line of sight drifted towards the figure on the bed. There was a man sleeping. He slowly walked to the side of the bed closest to him and looked down at the man. He had shallow facial features and a pure and honest face, as if he were a swordsman out of a movie based on Feudal Japan, but something caught his eye more - there was a bandage wrapped several times over a painful looking wound on his head.

Matsuda knew who he was. The man's name was Murasame Soushun. In the top position at the student council, he was the 'Super High School Level Student Council President'. He was also one of the 'survivors' of The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History. As if examining, Matsuda turned his gaze to the man. The man, lying on his back, had his eyes firmly open - although they saw nothing. They stared straight up at the ceiling, without moving, without blinking.

"… It's been a while." Matsuda tried calling out - but there was no response. He picked up the medical records next to the bed. He had already been told what was written there beforehand, more or less.

Murasame Soushun was involved in 'The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History', during which he suffered serious head trauma. Fortunately, he escaped any life-threatening injuries, he was supposedly able to recover however for several days to even after several weeks he was still not responsive at all. The reason as to why remains unknown.

As Matsuda returned the medical record to the bedside table he tried raising his voice again.

"Do you know who I am? I'm Matsuda Yasuke, from your class. I'm the Super High School Level Neurologist they were talking about. We've met several times before." As he expected there was no response. Matsuda continued to prompt him, "So, why do you think I came here?"

As he sat down, he looked at Murasame's face. He stared intently, searching for any hint of a reaction.

"I was asked by the school headmaster and members of the steering committee. I said I wanted to help your recovery. Even though I said I wanted to hear about what happened - they wouldn't tell me anything. In fact, they did the opposite. In order to cover it up, it seems they want to hear the full story from you." Matsuda paused and emphasized the words that followed. "Well, that's supposedly their intentions."

As always, Murasame didn't respond but Matsuda continued anyway.

"If you ask me, they don't like that you came back. That's why they sent me. So, even if I do everything I possible can, you can't stay. So, I don't really care either way. Having you gone will probably work out for the best for them. But what if you don't disappear? If you do come back, that'd really screw over their plans, won't it? When that happens, I wonder what they'll do… Once they get the story out of you, they'd be under a lot of pressure…" As Matsuda explained the circumstances he picked up Murasame's right hand - After lifting it up he soon released it. However the man's hand showed no sign of strength and dropped straight back onto the bed.

"But, I don't really know about that either… They're trying to hide and abandon the student council president… Because there's a criminal behind the incident, isn't there?" Matsuda leaned forward. They're faces were almost touching. He looked deeply into Murasame's unseeing eyes. One false move and this will turn into yaoi ronpa

"So, what do you think? Do you know the culprit? You need to tell me. Why are they protecting them?" As always there was no reply. Whether from his expression or from his eyes, there wasn't a hint of recognition.

"It really is useless…" Matsuda shook his head, looking frustrated. "Well, it's just the the examination that was the failure." He muttered grumpily as he scratched his head.

"Oh, that's right." He suddenly remembered something - he then asked in a tone feining casualness. "By any chance, do you know anyone by the name of Enoshima Junko?"

Murasame twitched slightly and his eyes moved. Matsuda expression turned into a glare quickly. Murasame turned directly towards him. Seeing that, Matsuda's reaction was surprisingly quite calm.

I knew it.

He couldn't help but feel discouraged.

It would be better if he were still unconscious.

But, not surprisingly, he wasn't. Though that was also to be expected. Matsuda had prepared for it a long time ago. He had no choice but to fall down from here. Like a fate that he had been doomed to since the very start. He was cursed to an unchangeable destiny. He knew he couldn't stop it, no matter what he did. The ground he was firmly walking on until now had collapsed. As he fell to the bottom of the deep abyss and he could taste it in his mouth.

It was just a metaphor but it was also quite real.

Even as he fell, Matsuda knew exactly what was happening.

CHAPTER 3

The sun's dazzling light beat down on the pavement outside the dormitory so brightly I couldn't help but squint my eyes though it wasn't strong enough to feel on my skin. In fact, I even shivered a little as the chilly wind ran past me. Despite all this I felt relaxed and stress-free as I sat down on a nearby bench and let out a deep sigh.

Ah, what a peaceful day.

I wanted to shout my thoughts out to the wind - I tilted my head to the side suddenly.

Huh? Wasn't there somewhere I needed to go?

I took 'Otonashi Ryouko's Memory Notebook' out of my backpack and opened it up so I could verify what it was I was supposed to do but my hand suddenly stopped. By chance the page I opened my notebook to was covered by a drawing of a man. My heart thumped a little faster.

"Eh, Matsuda-kun… ?" I couldn't spot any differences between the picture and the real thing but my heart was only beating a little faster. Perhaps, it's not really all that similar after all. "Hmmm, I guess if I change it a little it'll look more like him… ?"

It wasn't that I couldn't remember Matsuda-kun's face, I just needed to use my heartbeat in the place of my memory.

Maybe it's the eyes, or perhaps the mouth… I thought to myself as I drew. After some time my heart was almost pounding like it would in front of the real thing.

"Yup! That's probably more similar!" I patiently examined it as I gazed at it, Matsuda-kun. Matsuda-kun. Matsuda-kun. I repeated his name in my mind - See? My heart's pounding.

My heart beated harder as I brought the portrait closer to my face. As I drew more, it made the feeling stronger. I don't think I'm perverted or anything like that but I didn't want to kiss it in just a non-sexual way - I suddenly tilted my head to the side suddenly.

Huh? Wasn't there somewhere I needed to go?

With that thought in mind, I bid farewell to Matsuda-kun's picture and began flipping through my notebook. After turning through the pages for a short while - I finally remembered, at the same time I could feel my mood take a dramatic drop. I don't know why exactly but my whole body started to tremble. I remembered - I remembered that ridiculous murderer's confession.

That's right. Enoshima Junko also told me her purposes that time.

Kill your beloved darling, Matsuda Yasuke.

"She said… even if I don't remember… I'm still involved…" I was still trembling, she couldn't be right. I should quickly warn Matsuda-kun of the crisis he's in! I need to go to the biology building in the east district - that's where Matsuda-kun's neurology research is!

"I have no time to lose!" I jumped up from the bench and started to sprint with all my strength. Right now it was either break time or lunch time and the school was crowded with students outdoors. I pushed past people as I ran at full speed across the pavement. Of course, the people I pushed past would scream and cry things like "WAAH!" and "KYAA!" - but I didn't care.

Anyway, I was running across the pavement, leaving my thoughts behind and sprinting as fast as I could. I left any unneeded, idle thoughts fly away with the wind, my bullet of love was shooting directly towards where Matsuda-kun was.

I cut directly through the Central Plaza and arrived at the east district, I continued pushing past the other students and practically dived towards the biology building. My throat was dry and felt painful, in an instant I was leaping up the stairs. My breathing was erratic and heavy, I continued to push down my thoughts like how much my throat hurt or how much I'd like to take a rest out of my mind and kept sprinting. As soon as I arrived at the lab, I didn't bother to knock on the door, instead I threw it open.

"MATSUDA-KUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUN!!" I screamed with my remaining strength.

A short high school boy in the middle of the room straightened up in surprise and began trembling. His eyes were wide in surprise and turned to me, he was completely rigid and frozen.

Somehow, he doesn't look familiar at all.

Come to think of it, my heart isn't racing or beating any harder than usual.

"C-Could it be… you're not Matsuda-kun?"

"Mmm…"

"T-That's not a clear answer… ! Which 'mmm' do you mean?" I ended up yelling louder than I should have, but it was because I was still panting.

"Erm… I meant I'm not him by 'mmm'…"

"Then where's Matsuda-kun?!" I quickly looked around the lab.

God damn it, there's no one else here.

"He's out now, probably…"

"That's - If you looked, you'd know!" I roared back at him, I was at my wit's end. "Argh, come on!" I felt my stamina rapidly disappear and fell to my knees. "Of all the times he could disappeaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaar! Where did he goooooooooooooo?!"

I continued ranting while I sat on my knees, the young man ran over to me.

"I-it's fine, you shouldn't worry so much. I'm sure he'll be back soon!"

"……"

He looked down at me, why was he so worried about me? He looked at my with such concerned eyes, or maybe they were the opposite of worried. Maybe they were-

"… Actually you're a little suspicious." I started.

"… Huh?"

"Or is your personality just like that? I mean, maybe you're the kind of person that stares at clearly distraught, high school girls… Eek, keep away!" I fell onto my bum and tried to scoot away - The boy quickly looked away.

Shocked, my skirt flipped up, and more and more of my thighs were exposed.

"Eeek!" I patted down my skirt.

The boy was still looking away with his face bright red and spoke up

"I d-didn't do that! You seemed worried so all I did was talk to you…"

"Y-You liar! This is the first time we've met, I'm a complete stranger, it's weird to be concerned for someone you've never met before. I bet you just have some ulterior motive or secret intention or an evil plan or something…"

"… Eh?" The atmosphere suddenly changed to a more serious tone. "… A complete stranger?" He turned and looked straight at me, surprised.

Ah, that reaction, so then -

"… Huh? Have you met me before by any chance?" As I said that, the boy only looked more surprised, but only for a moment, he quickly changed his expression to a more formal one.

"My name is… Naegi Makoto." He said, suddenly introducing himself.

"… Aah, it's a pleasure." As I replied, my line of sight dropped down to 'Otonashi Ryouko's Memory Notebook'. Obviously his name didn't sound familiar to me at all, but I checked for any sign of his name in my notebook - His name wasn't anywhere in there.

So then we haven't met before.

I sent him a confused look, he returned a puzzled expression. His reactions were just becoming more and more suspicious - no matter what he says, this guy is definitely a pervert. I held my notebook in one hand, stood up and questioned him further.

"So, why are you a student at this school?"

"… Eh?"

"Huuh? Don't have a reasooon?" He really was suspicious after all, I stared at him, squinting my eyes.

"Ah, no, there's a reason, it's just… I wouldn't call it special…" As his sentence fell apart, he looked away, he was just becoming more and more suspicious - I continued to squint my eyes.

"I g-get it…" The boy nodded reluctantly, it seemed like he finally decided to talk. "Erm, since I'm particularly lucky…"

"… Excuse me?"

"So I'm 'Super High School Level Good Luck'."

"Super High School Level… Good Luck?" There seemed to be one underlying problem I was pretty anxious to learn about. "… So you're saying your talent is good luck?"

"I don't really get it either… but, that's what the school told me. Every year one person is chosen from a nationwide lottery of ordinary high school students, that student is entered into the school under the title of 'Super High School Level Good Luck'. So, by chance it turns out… I was the winner."

Hmm, somehow -

"That's kind of a jip…"

"Yeah, it really is, isn't it?" Naegi-kun seemed just as troubled over it as I.

Anyway, his innocence was becoming more and more apparent - However I still had no reason to believe him. It's much easier to just accept it as it was, though I'm not what you would call a loose woman.

"So, what is Mr. 'Super High School Level Good Luck' doing in this lab? Tell me, are you an acquaintance of Matsuda-kun? No lies!"

"Um, well…" Naegi-kun pulled something out of his uniform pocket. It was something that appeared to be a thin smartphone. "Matsuda Yasuke-san dropped this. It's always a hassle when someone loses something so I thought I'd give it back to him but…"

"… What is that? I've never seen it before."

"I'm sure this isn't your first time seeing it… look, it's an electronic student handbook."

Naegi-kun explained that this 'electronic student handbook' was only given out to students from the main school. It's a high tech piece of equipment with a variety of uses, as well as just acting as a student's ID. If a student doesn't present it, they lose access to some facilities.

"I found this by a bush in the courtyard. It's an inconvenience to lose this so I thought I should come here so I could pass it back to him as quickly as possible… but he doesn't seem to be here."

What? So then, does that mean Naegi-kun is-

"I-It's no good! I can't do it!!"

"W-What?"

"I can't say sorry to you for saying you were suspicious, you're only pretending to be a nice guy!"

"I-I'm not suspicious!" He quickly shook his head, "I'm not pretending to be nice or anything either… I just came here to give back Matsuda-san's lost item! That's really all there is to it!!"

"… Really?"

"R-Really!"

Well then, I suppose whether or not there's any more to this - I'll just have to believe him for now.

"Fine… I see."

"… You believe me now?" Naegi-kun breathed a sigh of relief as he laid a hand on his chest.

I turned to the boy, I pointed my index finger towards him, with the momentum it made a stiffening sound effect like the ones you read in manga.

"What you said was pretty misleading! You should have said from the very start that you weren't suspicious!"

"Huh? Um, uh… Sorry."

I don't know why he was saying sorry suddenly but he had an apologetic expression on his face.

"But you know, I guess that makes you unlucky. I mean, coming all the way here to return a lost item only to find he wasn't here. … Ah, I shouldn't be saying unlucky considering you're Mr. Super High School Level Good Luck himself."

"No, I'm used to this bad luck now…" Naegi-kun said, letting another bitter expression appear on his face.

Claiming to be 'Super High School Level Good Luck' then saying he's 'used to his bad luck', somehow it seems like he has a really unreliable talent - what a strange guy.

He's strange - I don't think I could find a word that suited him more than that.

That's it, he's just a strange guy.

He's such an ordinarily ordinary guy, he's strange.

According to my notebook, all students at Hope's Peak Academy are motivated and look towards the future, they are highly competitive and overflowing with ambition. They're brimming with hope - if it were me in his situation, I'd end up feeling bad - I guess.

But it didn't seem to be the case with him. That might be the reason why I think he's so strange. Naegi-kun suddenly interrupted my train of thought.

"But if that's true…"

"… Eh?" Without realising it, I asked him to repeat himself. "If what's true?"

"Eh? I-It's nothing… It's not important!" He replied hurriedly, it seemed like he was just talking to himself earlier.

"If it's not important then you can tell me. What do you mean by if that's true?" I ended up responding with an uncharacteristically strong tone of voice. Somehow, this guy's entire nature and attitude makes him strange. "Hey, tell me already! If it's not important then you should tell me. I'm right, aren't I? Hurry up and reply!"

"Ok-okay…"

"You should only reply with 'okay' once. I'm not your teacher!"

"… I only said it once, didn't I?"

Huh, really? I've already forgotten.

"Whatever! Just hurry up and tell me! If you don't tell me already, I'll end up forgetting what it is you're telling me!"

"Well, you see… I've only heard a rumour, so I'm not sure if I can believe it… but I thought it might be true…"

"… A rumour?" I once again raised my finger towards him, pointing it only a few centimetres away from his forehead. "Was it rumour about me? I won't stand for any awful rumours out there tainting my good name!"

"N-No, no! It's nothing like that!"

"So then, what sort of rumour is it?"

"Um, i-it's…" Naegi-kun looked away from me before hesitantly continuing, "…the rumour said there's student that's become forgetful…"

"Become… forgetful…?" Somehow I couldn't say anymore. Any knowledge of stringing a sentence together had mysteriously disappeared. I was planning to ask him if he knew me before I became forgetful -

"Ah!" I suddenly raised my voice. I shuddered as if I had been hit by a thunderbolt.

"W-What's wrong…" Naegi-kun turned to me again with a worried expression. I quickly opened 'Otonashi Ryouko's Memory Notebook' again and flipped through the pages, and flipped, and flipped, and flipped-I saw a light that blinded my eyes for a moment. There was an explosion. The memories in my notebook and a flash of inspiration collided together and caused a violent chemical reaction.

Sandwiched in my notebook was a single letter.

Dear Super High School Level Idiotic Forgetful girl,

I'm the one who took all your precious "past memories" that you so carefully wrote down. They're filled to the brim with "memories" of that Matsuda Yasuke. The past carries a lot of weight, doesn't it? Doesn't it? Am I right? It does…

"Hey, earlier you said a student had 'become forgetful', didn't you?" I was overtaken by an immense excitement as I stood up. "So then the students here know about me before I became forgetful? You too, right? You also knew me before I was forgetful? Speak up!"

"C-Calm down!" Naegi-kun desperately tried to settle me down. "I don't really know but… it seems like it was due to some sort of illness, but I wasn't really paying too much attention… since I'm not really all that good at talking to people…"

"It's fine, just hurry up and tell me! Did you know me before I was forgetful? Did you?"

"Um… well, that's…"

"Go on!"

"… Y-Yeah" He finally gave a small nod.

"I… I knew it…" I confirmed to myself.

The students at this school knew me before I had become forgetful - that means I had become forgetful after coming to this school. So then, what about that blackmail Enoshima Junko had written to me about my 'past memories'? Did I really ever have such an important 'memory notebook'? No, maybe it was all just a trap so she could get me to cooperate with her.

In other words, a lie.

So then, what else did she say? Let's see, she told me she killed someone in the central plaza, she also told me that I had to kill Matsuda-kun. In the first place, does a person like Enoshima Junko even exist-As my thoughts circled through my head, I tried to remain focused on my notebook. 'Lie' and 'Enoshima Junko' were the two key phrases that were becoming more apparent. The words written on the page started to swirl around my mind. They gradually grew faster, swirling, turning, circling, they mixed and mingled together. For some reason, the depths of my head began to tingle. It was a strange tingling feeling.

This sensation is…

Huh? I feel like I'm remembering something…

"Hey…" An annoying voice came pounding into my thoughts. It was Naegi-kun's voice. He didn't seem bothered by anything. I stopped concentrating on my notebook. I think I can almost remember it…

"Hey…"

Shut up!

"H-Hey…"

Argh, come on! I'm trying to concentrate here!

"Hey… !"

"Would you shut up already?!" I shouted at him and raised my face from my notebook - I froze.

I saw an unfamiliar man standing in front of us.

… Eh, who is that?

He grabbed Naegi-kun's shoulders. He wore an unfamiliar school uniform and had unfamiliar long hair. His pitch black silhouette was vastly different to his ghostly white face. Piercing eyes, similar to a reptile's had been carved into his face.

Our eyes met for a brief moment - a siren inside my head rang out, informing me of the dire emergency. I felt like I was having a heart attack as I felt my chest pound faster.

"H-Hey…" Naegi-kun's face looked shocked, his entire body had gone stiff and he opened his mouth. "H-He came in after us, do you know him? If you do, by chance, know him… could you do me a favour and tell him to let go of me… ?"

"U-Unfortunately, it seems like I've got no idea who he is…" I answered him.

"Oy, what was that?" The strange man growled in a low voice. "Don't tell me you've forgotten me already? That's a little… harsh, isn't it?"

"… Y-You really do know him?" Naegi-kun asked in a puzzled voice, the man's eyes drifted down to him suspiciously.

"Whether we have met before or whether it is simply fate… neither are of any concern to you. You've just been caught up in it all. In the end you just have bad luck."

I quickly dropped my line of sight to my notebook, and looked for any memories about this stranger - there was only one person who came to mind.

"Could you be… Madarai Isshiki-san?"

"… That's right. Late that night in the central plaza I, Madarai, was killed by my own target."

"Killed… by your own target?" Despite what he said, he looked completely uninjured to me -

"I am immortal."

"… Eh?"

The man sensed my doubts, he smiled broadly and chuckled strangely.

Immortal?

What is this? A fantasy based novel?

"Um… you're not being serious, are you?"

"You're sure about that?"

"Erm… What do you mean?"

"I'm truly immortal. If I were not, I would be unable to explain how I am now uninjured…"

"Well I'm not sure about that, but how did you just change the genre to something like a war based game…"

"Um, can I speak for a moment?" Naegi-kun cut in. "T-The guy who came in after us… Madarai-san, was it? Um… if you are Madarai-san, you couldn't mean you're Madarai-san from the student council?"

"Eh, student council?" I said without thinking.

Somehow, I could not see this creepy man dressed in all black, in the student council.

"Hmmm, I see. The boy knows…" Madarai grimaced and closed his eyes before murmuring something. "… That's right. I'm a survivor from the student council."

"S-Survivor?"

"… You're still pretending to be innocent after so long?"

Madarai opened his eyes, and stared at me carefully.

"It's because of 'that incident' all this happened. That incident is the reason behind the state of the student council now. I had luckily escaped with my life but everyone else had…"

No, that's not it - Madarai shook his head, as if trying to disprove his own words.

"… Perhaps it's wrong for me to say it was lucky I survived. It's more correct to say I simply remained alive. Yes, that's it, I luckily remained alive. I was not even given the chance to fight… and for that, I shall not just forgive them. I will absolutely not forgive them of stealing my chance to protect the student council. Who was it? Who did it?" Madarai spat out as he clenched his hands around Naegi-kun's shoulders. The boys face distorted with pain, but he still attempted to object, despite his discomfort.

"E-Excuse me, I don't really know the details but… I understand you feel angry about what happened to the student council… and I understand that you hate the person who did this, but I think it might be good to instead consider rebuilding the student council before anything else…"

"Rebuild it? Me?" Madarai scoffed, "Nah. In the first place, why do you even think someone like me belongs in the student council?"

"…… Eh?"

"I was only elected so the other members would be able to relax. After all, I'm only the 'Super High School Level Bodyguard'. I did what I could for the student council. In the past, now, and forever, I am just 'a protector'. That's all…" I heard Madarai grind his teeth, his voice was filled with bitter hatred. "During that… time of emergency, I was not fit to help them. I wasn't even a target during the incident. Perhaps the criminal did not consider me to be a member

of the student council? Can you even imagine how humiliating this has been for me? I wasn't even given a chance to utilize my own talent. The feeling I had from having my own talent trampled on was… Oy, you bastards better be imagining what it felt like so you can relate…."

Madarai gripped Naegi-kun's shoulders even more tightly. The pain the young man felt only increased, and he yelled out.

"… Now I can only protect the remaining dignity of the student council. It will not end until I've atoned for the student council… I must confront it. That's why I must exact revenge. I am no longer able to slack off. I am willing to do… anything."

The man's eyes were stained red, not focusing on anything anymore. In any case the man seemed completely settled on the idea of pushing his point.

"I d-don't… know anything about what happened…" I ended up trying to excuse myself for whatever actions I did. I felt an overwhelming fear come over me as I desperately tried to make an excuse to run away. "I d-don't have anything to do with the student council or know anything about any incidents that happened… or anything dangerous of that sort at all… I-I'm just an innocent bystander!"

"As if…" Madarai disagreed, he sounded like he way making a death threat to his worst enemy. "We talked about it earlier. You know all about that incident."

"I r-really don't know anything about it! If you think I'm lying… then please look at this notebook!" I opened 'Otonashi Ryouko's Memory Notebook' and waved it in front of Madarai. "I haven't written anything in here about it! This is my proof! I don't know anything about it and I have nothing to do with it!"

"Would you cut the crap already?" A voice overflowing with fury pierced through my notebook to me. "That notebook of yours doesn't prove anything… why are you hiding the truth? Are you the criminal's apprentice? Can't talk about it? Or maybe you're really-"

"I s-said I have nothing to do with it!" I suddenly screamed at him. I instantly regretted doing so. I only added fuel to the fire. I thought he'd be really angry at me… but it seems like my prediction was way off mark, in fact his face was surprisingly blank.

"……..." His emotions had flatlined, he didn't even blink. Any concept of time around the man had come to a complete stop. Naegi-kun sensed Madarai's malice and looked behind him timidly. "…… Come to think of it, I haven't heard this boy's name yet, have I?" He remained expressionless, only his mouth moving.

"I-I'm… Naegi Makoto…"

Hearing that, Madarai laughed softly and leaned down to speak in Naegi-kun's ear.

"Say, Naegi-kun. Were you listening to what I was saying before?"

"… Huh?"

Madarai suddenly released Naegi-kun's shoulders only to place both of his hands on either side of Naegi-kun's head.

"Ah… !!" Naegi-kun's face instantly morphed into a terrified expression.

"I said earlier, didn't I? I am willing to do anything for vengeance." Madarai looked like a demon as he opened his mouth - he smiled and laughed, his voice full of poisonous venom.

This is bad. That guy is incredibly dangerous!

Somehow, I was only left with the ability to shiver and tremble like a frightened little bunny - I have no choice but to make a run for it… and quick!

"You're not thinking of running, are you?"

"… Eh?" My foot suddenly stopped in midair.

"If you do that… what do you think will happen to this boy here?"

"… Eh? Eh?" As I heard this, Naegi-kun's face changed from blue to white. Wow, what a colourful face he has!

"This is the last warning you get… so watch yourself. If you don't obey me, this guy's head will be tragically crushed in an unfortunate accident."

"Wh-what the…" I could only feel confused, both of them looked at me.

Say something - Madarai's stare intimidated me, like he was about to do something reckless.

Help me - Naegi-kun's eyes pleaded to me.

Intimidating eyes and pleading eyes.

Both were entirely focused on me and…

What a bother.

It was a bother to go to the hassle of doing either. There's nothing I would really be able to do, or wanted to do, I guess. That's why for me this was something that had…

"Nothing to do with me…"

That's right, it has nothing to do with me. Sure, I happened to be swept along with the current, but that's all, I wasn't involved with the creation of this situation at all. I don't even know anything about what happened, that's why it has…

"Nothingtodowithmenothingtodowithmenothingtodowithmenothingtodowithmenothingtodowithmenothingtodowithme…" I mumbled quietly, reminding the people in front of me, as well as just myself. I was mumbling my magical enchantment.

"Huh?"

"Huh?" Having heard that, both Madarai and Naegi-kun looked at me with vacant expressions.

"What do you mean by it has nothing to do with you…?" A confused Madarai raised his voice. "There's no way you're not involved… after it's your fault this boy here has been caught up in all this."

"You're wrong," I found myself replying flatly, "I'm not the reason as to why he became involved in this whole thing, he got himself involved, it's not my fault he has god-awful luck. In the end I really have nothing to do with this."

"H-Hey, wait a-" As Naegi-kun tried to interrupt me I raised my voice to continue my argument.

"It's a shame, but it's obvious Naegi-kun has no luck at all," I said in the calmest tone I could muster, "He just has an insane power to take and give life because of his complete lack of luck. So, I think you have no choice but to give up."

Anyway, no matter what the case is, I've already forgotten. After all, I forget everything sooner or later, with the exception of Matsuda-kun. So, as far as I see it, there's not really much out there that actually does have anything to do with me - I continued to mutter to myself these words, in all truth I really had nothing to do with it.

Then I'll forget that too. My brief meeting with Naegi-kun, the information he knew, I'll forget that as well. There's no reason for me to feel bad about him. So that's why I always say this has nothing to do with me.

"… Have you decided what you're going to do?"

"I don't know. I keep telling you this has nothing to do with me." I answered blankly.

"Is that so? I see," Madarai bared his teeth, murmuring in a low voice, "I hope you're prepared to see the extent of my resolution."

There really are strange people who are ready to go as far as to kill another human in order to prove their point. It's insane to think he would accomplish anything by killing Naegi-kun.

Naegi-kun really doesn't have any luck.

He's gotten himself into a hostage situation after all.

"This is the end." Madarai gripped Naegi-kun's skull with all the strength in his hands and-

"… You're wrong!" A voice resounded throughout the room that seemed to dissolve the tension in the air. A crazy person ran into the lab. The figure appeared to slide towards Madarai, and hammered the back of their fist into the man's nose, making it bend to a strange angle. Madarai squinted his eyes shut in pain. He seemed to lose sight of his attacker as he fell down.

After giving Madarai's chest a prod the stranger turned to Naegi-kun and grasped his head in their hands before moving to pick Naegi-kun up. They placed him gently on top of the bed and turned around - Madarai flew towards them. The stranger gracefully roundhouse kicked and hit Madarai square on the chin. The blow completely smashed his keypoint and rocked his head violently, he fell the the ground, having no energy left.

By the way, this scene I just witnessed, it passed in the blink of an eye. The stranger skillfully landed without making a sound after they finished their kick. Their skirt gently floated down - oh, they're a she?

"I-Ikusaba-san!" Naegi-kun called out from the bed in relief.

Ikusaba-san - it seems like that is this girl's name. Of course, this is the first time I've heard her name.

Naegi-kun got up from the bed and ran hurriedly to the girl.

"T-thank you, Ikusaba-san! Thank you so much!" He said, thanking her over and over again. However, the girl remained completely calmed and composed in response. Well I say calm and composed, but I think it's more like she just didn't feel anything.

"I was only helping my classmate…" she mumbled quietly to herself. Stubbornly, Ikusaba-san avoided his gaze. But it's odd, looking at her now, you wouldn't guess she had just been fighting brilliantly only a few moments beforehand.

"Ah… but Ikusaba-san, why are you here?"

I must admit I was wondering the same thing, usually it's only Matsuda-kun in this lab - that's what I had written down in my notes, also it seems like he's absent today, but he has been getting a multitude of visitors. Maybe he's been working on something big?

"Oh… um…" Ikusaba-san raised her voice slightly, but it was barely above a whisper, I listened carefully. "… I was just passing by?"

"Eh, why'd you phrase it as a question?" I asked without thinking.

"… Ikusaba-san, you haven't changed one bit," Naegi-kun interrupted. "… So then, you were just passing by when you came across what was happening and you came to save us, right?" Ikusaba-san nodded in response.

"That's it… and you saved me. I was getting worried for a moment there… Thank you, Ikusaba-san. Thank you so much!" Naegi-kun sighed a breath of relief and continued to repeat his sincere thanks, much to Ikusaba-san's embarrasment.

"I was really lucky… you were just passing by… I was so lucky…"

Luck - somehow that was how we were saved. Pure luck. But that is only in a manner of speaking. All thanks to such a strong person who was passing by we were able to escape from such a predicament but…

This luck was really convenient and good.

On the other hand though, Madarai's actions were inconvenient to say the least.

Ah, so this is Super High School Level Good Luck?

But if it is luck, I can't help but feel that it was all because of it that we were caught up in all this.

"Excuse me."

"… Eh?" I suddenly realised Ikusaba-san was standing right in front of me. "AWAWAWA!!" I leapt back without thinking. Now that I think about it, did I really not notice her? Did she teleport?

"……" For some reason Ikusaba remained silent.

"……" I waited for her to show any signs of opening her mouth to speak, but I ended up giving in and raising my own voice.

"Um, nice to meet you… thank you very much for earlier."

"Eh?" Naegi-kun raised his voice in surprise. He walked to us, invading our line of sight as he blinked in surprise - But what was so surprising?

"… I'm Ikusaba Mukuro" I tilted my head to the side slightly, in response, Ikusaba-san raised her voice a little more, "I'm the 'Super High School Level Soldier' from the 78th batch… Nice to meet you." Without even blinking, she moved her mouth as little as possible as she introduced herself. The moment she finished she returned to utter silence.

"……"

Speaking honestly, she seemed like a quiet girl by nature. Then again, she is a Super High School Level Soldier, she probably acts like this around everyone - perhaps every soldier is like this? However I haven't met any members of the military before so I have no way of knowing. I just don't know…

"……." I was in silence with her.

"……." Even Naegi-kun was silent, but he was as puzzled as before.

"……." Madarai, still foaming at the mouth was, of course, silent too.

Everyone was silent.

An awkward silence.

But the awkwardness didn't last long. After some time, I forgot about the awkward silence. Instead, another thought wandered into my mind.

Ah, now that I think about it, Matsuda-kun isn't here.

That's right. The only thing I can ever remember is Matsuda-kun.

I wonder if Matsuda-kun is on an errand.

I want to see him soon. I hope he comes back quickly.

My thoughts continued as I stared into space and-

"…..!" The girl crouched down suddenly… Um, I think her name was Ikusaba-san.

"W-What's wrong?" The surprised boy, Erm, Naegi-kun I think, asked. The girl replied in a warning tone.

"… Someone's there." The atmosphere of the lab became much more tense.

"Eh? Hiding…?"

"Sorry for interrupting. I wasn't trying to hide! But you shouldn't spread rumours about people!" A voice rose and everyone instinctively looked around the lab.

"… Huh?" But no matter how hard we looked, there wasn't anyone there.

"No, I'm here! Look look, over here!"

"Eh? W-Where…?" Feeling somewhat panicked I continued looking around the room restlessly.

"O-Over there!" Naegi-kun pointed out, Ikusaba-san walked to the laboratory door.

"Ah!" I noticed a little later than the others, in front of the door stood a boy with a pure, innocent face.

"Oh, you finally noticed me?" The boys face lacked any distinctive features, his voice also had a complete lack of any unique tones. "It took you a little while but you noticed me in the end… Well, it's my talents fault so it can't be helped… I'll forgive you."

"W-Why's there a kid here?!" Naegi-kun suddenly said, taken aback by the boy.

"Hey, hey, you shouldn't treat me like I'm a kid. I don't think it's rare to see someone with a baby face but I'm a meritorious high school student at Hope's Peak Academy! I even went to the trouble of using a difficult word, like 'meritorious'… oh, what's all this then?" The boy's line of sight fell to where Madarai was, "Oh my, oh my… looks like you've gotten yourselves into quite a mess…"

"Ah! Y-You're wrong about that!" Naegi-kun quickly ran in between the boy and Madarai, trying to obstruct his view, "H-How to put it… it might look like a slight accident but…"

The boy patted his hand on Naegi-kun's shoulder.

"Ah, don't fret. There's no need to make excuses around me. I'm actually also investigating this case… Isn't that right, big sis?"

"Eh?" Despite having the reigns of his great story handed over to me, I didn't remember anything about it at all. I wasn't able to muster any more than, "I guess so?" and tilt my head to the side.

"… Huh? Don't tell me, you've forgotten about me again?" he folded his arms and nodded happily, "Well, I'm used to people forgetting who I am so it's fine. It's just another side-effect of my talent. Look, I said I have no presence, didn't I? People don't notice me very often, and they say that they forgot about me a lot… but you know, Big Sis," The boy started rubbing his hands and raised his voice again, "I have a request that this time when I say my name you remember it! My name is Kamishiro Yuuto! I'm a "Super High School Level Spy" from the 77th batch!"

"W-Wait… a second…" I protested as the boy came closer to me, I opened up 'Otonashi Ryouko's Memory Notebook' and tried to quickly find any memories mentioning the boy, "Ah, I got it! Kamishiro-kun! I remember you! Kamishiro-kun with absolutely no unique features whatsoever!"

"I wouldn't say none…" murmured Ikusaba-san with a neutral expression, "He looks like a doll made by someone with the creativeness of a politician, he gives off bad vibes…" I didn't think she was the type to say things so bluntly.

Kamishiro-kun glared at Ikusaba-san for a moment before returning his stare to me and then said in a very over-the-top voice.

"Weeeeell theen!! It's really awful that you're so forgetful, big sis! When you first told me I thought you were joking I almost laughed, haha!"

"W-Wait… That isn't something you should confess in front of a person… !!" having heard him, Naegi-kun quickly interjected but Kamishiro-kun payed him no mind.

"Ahaha, I don't need to be careful. I've always thought being careful was for losers. But, I don't think you have any experience with that, do you, big bro… you see, I understand completely," Kamishiro-kun slipped past Naegi-kun and stood in front of me and made sure we were face to face before saying any more, "You really are amazingly forgetful. saying such ditzy things don't really fit you, but I like it. Actually, there are a lot of girls out there who have ditzy personalities now that I think about it… in fact, my equipment down below gets a little harder just talking about them!"

We all blinked in surprise. The culprit was of course the blunt explicit adult joke.

"Well, in any case she's my client so I'm genuinely relieved to see nothing happened to her. But, in the end…" Kamishiro-kun turned his line of sight back to Madarai, "No matter how much I think about it, I can't decide if this is a bad situation or not. I thought it really was. You know, they say my personality is warm and friendly enough to melt all the ice cream in a convenience store, though I suppose something like that is more of a pet peeve to some."I honestly can't make sense of this last bit.

"Erm, I think m-maybe it was overkill…" Naegi-kun once again began to apologise about this situation, "How to put it… perhaps it's better to say it was self-defence…"

"That's not what I meant." Kamishiro-kun said hitting him lightly, he slowly walked over to Madarai's body and mumbled to himself, "Honestly, talk about a worst case scenario… well, it won't solve anything anyhow. But when he wakes up, will you resort to violence again? What will you do? You can't just leave him here now can you?"

"Well… if we all go to the security department and explained-"

"We can't do that, big bro," He stared at Naegi-kun, analyzing him, "You do know I came all the way here just so I could have an important talk to big sis, my client? You understand? It's an important talk, got it? What I'm trying to say is we're too busy!"

"U-Um… but…" Naegi-kun was completely overpowered by Kamishiro-kun's icy-cold stare.

Unexpectedly, a voice sounded out throughout the room.

"I'll do something about it…" Everyone turned to look at Ikusaba-san. The girl quickly lowered her gaze to the ground and repeated herself, "I-I'll do something about it…"

"And you can do it by yourself?" Kamishiro-kun asked, drawing closer to her. The girl nodded. "The heck, do you even understand me!" The next moment, Kamishiro-kun's eyes sparkled brightly, "I see, I see. I get it now! You can take care of all this by yourself? Hm, hm, hearing that really puts my mind to ease! Ah, by the way, it would be better not to mention this to the security department. Since it'll be difficult to deal with them."

"W-Wait a second!" Naegi-kun interrupted him again. "If we don't properly explain the situation, Ikusaba-san will be blamed."

"Huh?" Kamishiro-kun remained staring intently at Naegi-kun. I couldn't imagine his young face anymore and felt myself get hot, Naegi-kun remained dead silent. "You still don't get me even though I've said it a million times already? Big sis and I are busy. We have no time to help you clear this up. You side characters can go ahead and do it without our permission. In the first place, since you are the guys resorted to such a violent solution, it makes you the bad guys. If it were me, I would have done a much better job."

He continued to prattle on about his self importance. Naegi-kun could find any words to reply with but somehow he had not yet lost his head.

Ikusaba-san murmured a little more.

"It's okay… I'll do something about it so…"

"I-Ikusaba-san!"

"…. It's fine," with a short sentence, Ikusaba-san managed to silence the worrying Naegi-kun.

Kamishiro-kun and I turned to one another and he muttered, "It might be good to head off now…"

"Well then, it's decided!" Kamishiro-kun had an innocent smile on his face and he clapped his hands happily. "Leave the job to big sis over there… idiotic big sis and I are gonna go somewhere else!"

Kamishiro-kun grabbed my hand and with a quick, "Yay, let's go, let's go!" he started acting like a child dragging his poor parents to the toy store.

"W… Wait a mo-"

"It's fine, it's fine! You want to go back to your peaceful old life, don't you, big sis? So you should just quieten down and come with me!" Kamishiro-kun continued dragging me along behind him until we reached the door of the lab, I looked back hopelessly. The ever expressionless Ikusaba-san and Naegi-kun looking worried again stood up.

Naegi-kun took a single step. He had a look of determination. He quickly became startled however - Ikusaba-san had laid her hand on his shoulder. He looked back to her, she warned him and nodded softly. Seeing that Naegi-kun seemed to give in, relaxing his shoulders. He turned to look at me once more - the two figures disappeared in the distance.

"Now then, let's move on and do our beeeeest!!" The moment we entered the hallway, Kamishiro-kun excitedly cheered. "Let's solve your probleeeem!!"

Kamishiro-kun continued to walk, leaving me behind.

"… Ah, wait for me!" I called out as I hurriedly ran after him - but, my mind was drifting elsewhere.

I was thinking about Naegi-kun looking at me for that last moment. His eyes sent me a burning feeling of unease. The individual named Naegi Makoto gave me a sense of unreliability and had a weak demeanor - but in the depths of his eyes at that moment, there was an incredible strength from his very core that shook all my previous preconceptions of who this person was. He looked at me with a dazzling aura. Whether there was a problem, whether he had an unbeatable enemy, he always would have a strength so strong he could never give up.

Such an unforeseeable person looked straight at me with those eyes. I don't understand how I can feel this way around such a strange, mysterious force. However, I doubt I'll ever need to know. After all, he has nothing to do with me, but that's not just a reason I'm using because it suits me, I just feel as though he basically has nothing to do with me. For example, as if we were in alternate dimensions, surely Naegi-kun's story and my own story will never cross paths again. In conclusion we have nothing to do with each other.

I felt like that for some reason.

So, I'll forget that boy with a reason, that was what I had concluded as I walked down the biology building hallways.

In fact, in just a matter of minutes - I completely forgot of his existence.

CHAPTER 4

Red eyes.

The whites of the eyes seemed almost painted red. The eyes turned towards their companion, Matsuda Yasuke muttered a questioned.

"… How long have you been conscious?"

After blinking for a strangely long time, the person on the bed - 'Super High School Level Student Council President', Murasame Soushun opened his mouth slowly. His lips were parched and made a dry sound as he opened his mouth.

"… Always," His voice was quiet and hoarse. He sounded like a completely different person in comparison to before.

"So that's how it's been…" Matsuda let a grin creep into his expression. He turned to his friend showing a friendly smile. "But don't you think it's stupid to trick me like that?"

However Murasame did not make a sound. His eyes showed no emotion as he stared at Matsuda. Matsuda continued in his joking tone to help calm the tense atmosphere.

"It must have taken a lot of acting on your part. Your actual physiological symptoms and echos of such have almost completely disappeared… yet you were easily able to cease being a normal person. We wouldn't have been in this situation had I not seen through your act."

"Why did you come?" But his reply almost came with a violent attitude.

As if giving up, Matsuda's expression returned to a more sober look.

"You said that earlier. You asked those ancient artifacts from the steering committee that. I want you to find out… whether you really woke up or not."

In response Murasame only looked away, redirecting his attention to the ceiling and blinking without meaning.

"To be honest… even I'm having my doubts…" Matsuda licked his dry lips before continuing, "What if… I told those people that you're awake?"

Murasame remained silent to Matsuda's questioning. Like a remote controlled car with a flat battery, his reactions were slow and sluggish at best.

Maybe it isn't just acting.

Matsuda breathed out a deep sigh - he just answered his own question.

"Still, I'm sure the news will surprise them. After that… I already guessed what would happen. Didn't they used to say when people needed to prepare for the worst… 'Desperate times call for desperate measures'? At the moment they're relying entirely on influential people outside the school to cover up this incident," Matsuda looked away from Murasame and slowly gazed at his surroundings. Instead of looking for some kind of reaction from Murasame, he turned to the surrounding electronic equipment, as if trying to communicate with it, "After all… they can't afford to make up excuses for this. Like allowing a known threat into the general public, they can't just pretend there's no danger.

There are also people who say who say a ruthless person cannot be a good researcher… well, not that it matters. It depends on how much talent there is."

Matsuda stayed talkative and Murasame didn't even shift an eyebrow. Murasame Soushun used to be the kind of person who would at least pretend to laugh no matter how bad the joke was - it seemed like that man was no longer there.

The issue isn't that he's feeling depressed.

As Matsuda sighed, he brushed his hair out of his face. His long, narrow eyes looked sharply at Murasame.

"Oy, Murasame. This isn't a bargaining point, but I do want to tell you… I'm saying this to make sure you understand, the school's intentions and the steering committee's intentions are very different. To be truthful, I don't care what those guys think. I just want to know what the hell is happening at this school. So then I-"

"I'm just pretending…" Murasame suddenly opened his mouth. Matsuda saw him smile - or maybe he imagined it. In the next moment, any trace of it had completely disappeared. The reaction he just gave him, proved that good person was still there.

There might be some more to this.

Matsuda took off his jacket and untucked his worn out white shirt, returning to his more familiar appearance. It wasn't because he had become more relaxed. If anything it was just the opposite. It felt more like he was just getting down to business.

"I get it, I don't think you'll be able to escape by just using this act. Even though you're in this state, you're still worried about this school… and you're willing to fight for it? That's why you're using this act, so you can escape from the eyes of the steering committee?"

Matsuda sat down on the bed, and leaned in to say something.

"If I were you, I'd be trying to get used to this kind of power. I'll protect you if I have to. Once I give my false report to those guys, you might even be able to fight along with them. Since it's not always that bad to fight alongside the bad guys…"

Matsuda once again asked how Murasame's condition was - only to see Murasame would not reply or react.

"No matter what the force behind it is, I still don't know very much about the incident. That's why I need you to survive and explain it to me, but…" Murasame lowered his eyelids slightly - At the very least, from what Matsuda could gather, his slight movement meant refusal. Matsuda thought this would be the case but he had a more pressing question. Though he didn't particularly want to hear the answer which may be given, because it was something he had been told before.

"The culprit is… Kamukura Izuru, correct?" That was his question, "I heard about it from the staff members, the name of the person who survived the incident and then went missing afterwards is called Kamukura Izuru. But, does that person… really exist?"

After a short silence, Murasame finally opened his mouth.

"Kamukura Izuru… killed the… student council…" His voice was hoarse and unused, but he conveyed his message.

"… So then, Kamukura Izuru is real?" Matsuda listened for confirmation however Murasame didn't reply. His mouth remained open, stiff and unmoving.

"Oy, Murasame…" Matsuda called out, urging him on, the boy's mouth finally moved again.

"… Whatever." He finished saying only that. Matsuda sensed something from his word.

So then, that doesn't matter.

There was no sense of crisis in the Hope's Peak Academy Murasame held onto. So then it isn't a known fact whether Kamukura Izuru is the culprit behind the incident or not.

Matsuda's thoughts went along the lines of, 'That must be it!'

There was one more thing Matsuda needed to hear above all else - he had realised.

He breathed in heavily and before giving himself a chance to hesitate, he asked his question.

"What about Enoshima Junko? What connection does she have to the incident?"

Murasame closed his eyes. It was a blink that seemed to last forever. The next moment he opened his eyes again - his face was unfamiliar.

Tears were threatening to spill from his open eyes, he made a gritting sound with his teeth bared. His crazed expression turned into one of pure exhaustion.

Then Matsuda realised.

The person named Murasame Soushun was no longer there.

The man they called 'Super High School Level Student Council President' was completely gone.

The boy who was familiar to him had met his end.

"I-I-IIIIIIIIIIIIIIII"

'That thing' opened it's mouth painfully wide - He began to spit out words that did not even sound like words.

"I-IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIImmmmmuuuuuuuuuuuussssssssssssttttttttttt….kkkkkkiiiiiiiilllllllllllllll….
IIIIIIIIIImmmmmmmmmuuuuuuuuuussssssssssssttttttttttttt…kkkkkkkkkkiiiiiiiiiiilllllllllllllllllllllllll!"

I must kill?

"Who? Who are you talking about?" Matsuda placed his hands on 'that thing's bedside and looked down to him as he asked. Huge, red, sore eyes turned towards Matsuda briefly.

"Enoshi…ma…Jun……ko"

Enoshima Junko.

The inside of his body was beaten by something as he was overtaken by shock. It was the beating of his own heart. The harsh impact it had caused Matsuda to lose his own voice.

Suddenly, 'that thing' screamed out.

"… AAAA

Finally the incredibly loud voice, the screams of 'that thing' had come to a stop.

The bed to which he was assigned started to shake with a loud rattling sound.

Matsuda was leaning forward, his hair falling in front of his eyes. However he didn't loosen his grip. Instead he tightened it, he put all his power into his hands.

Quickly, the bed's shaking subsided. The feeling of what his hands were wrapped around disappeared.

The feeling of 'that thing' ending.

After a while, Matsuda finally opened his eyes again. All the muscles in his body felt exhausted and tense, as if he had become a solid piece of iron. Sweat dripped from his forehead, landing on his long eyelashes.

He blankly turned his line of sight towards 'that thing' on top of the bed. The light from those eyes had disappeared - all that was left was a deep darkness.

Those eyes held a darkness deeper than the colour of darkness itself.

CHAPTER 5

In one of the East District's cafeteria's.

It's de facto name is "The Third School Cafeteria". Although there are several cafeterias scattered throughout the campus, this is the most popular by far… apparently.

During noon, it's filled not only students but also teaching staff lined up in a queue. It seems the secret behind the popularity of this cafeteria is the student they call 'Super High School Level Cook' who boasts of his own unique recipe. His food isn't governed by genre or common sense, and I hear it's so addictive you can't help but feel like it must contain drugs but-Come to think of it, it doesn't really matter since I've forgotten how addictive it is.

Well, in any case! Even now the student cafeteria is filled with students so there wasn't a single seat available. For someone like me standing by myself, this atmosphere was anything but comfortable-

"I'm here too, you know!"

"Eh, did you hear me? Um…"

"I told you, I'm the 'Super High School Level Secret Agent" from the 77th batch, Kamishiro Yuuto! Come on!! How many times do I have to introduce myself?!" Kamishiro-kun said as he made a cross shape with his arms in front of me, "Damn it, it seems like we have bad chemistry, I was praying to god a lot that we'd be a good combination… too bad."

"What kind of god were you praying to… ?"

In any case, it seems Kamishiro-kun and I certainly do have bad chemistry.

Forgettable Kamishiro-kun and forgetful me.

He was holding what looked to be a mixture of pale calpis and water.

"Well, whatever! What's more important is starting our conversation!"

"Right, we can do that but…" I looked around at the student's bustling through the cafeteria, "Why come here of all places?"

Kamishiro-kun waved his short finger in front of me with a tsk tsk tsk.

"It's bad taste to answer such a question to an outsider, if anything this is the perfect place for it. If we talked about this in a place with only a few people, someone would be able to overhear us easily. It's a theory I have that we should hide like we're extras in an adult video."

"So what you're saying is if we need to talk about something important, we should pretend we're having a normal chat."

"What I'm saying is, it'd be lonely if I was here by myself!"

Our casual conversation was buried in the sound of the hustle and bustle around us.

"See! No one cares about our conversation, do they?" Kamishiro-kun had a huge grin on his face like he had just committed some fantastic prank. He then moved onto the main topic, "There's a reason why I wanted to talk to you as soon as possible… Did anyone go to your room this morning, big sis?"

"Eh? Did they?"

"It's fine if you've forgotten. Just check in your notebook."

Surprised, I did as I was told and took out 'Otonashi Ryouko's Memory Notebook' and looked through it.

"… Ah!" I remembered in no time at all. I couldn't help but yell out as I remembered. "I-I remember! I know, it was Enoshima Junko! That girl suddenly came into my room!"

"Huuh." Kamishiro suddenly leaned forward. "So then, that person really was Enoshima Junko. I knew it… yup, it seems like that wiretap I put in your room worked perfectly."

Huh?

"Say, Kamishiro-kun?"

"Hm, what?"

"What did you say just now? Did you say… a wiretap?"

"Yeah I said that. I said wiretap. What about it?"

"… A wiretap?"

"Yes, it's a common machine used for eavesdropping."

I quickly stood from my chair.

"H-H-How is that normal?!" I screamed at the top of my lungs, "Normal, common people don't use those machines!"

Kamishiro-kun's face was as calm as ever.

"Let's not rant on about the wiretap. It was crime prevention."

"Wiretaps aren't just used to prevent crimes!!"

"Ahaha, so you noticed! Clap, clap, clap!" As he verbally applauded me, he took out a giant paper bag from under his chair. The boy immediately shoved his hand into the bag and pulled out a sweet bread, "Ah, a Sugar Twist Doughnut!" As he cheered out by himself, he happily crammed it into his mouth.

"… That's a little rude."

"Hugha Fuwa Fughu."

"I have no idea what you just said."

Kamishiro-kun swallowed down the sweet bread that had been stuffed into his mouth.

"… I said, I don't want you to misunderstand me, I didn't just wiretap you, big sis. In a broader sense of speaking… I guess I wiretapped around this many people?" Kamishiro-kun held up all his fingers.

"Eeh! Ten people?!"

"Mmmm," he shook his head, "A hundred people."

"A… A hundred people!"

Each finger was to signify a unit of ten people!

"You can sit a hundred people on an Inaba Monooki shed no problem!"

(Inaba Monooki seems to be a Japanese storage company, Kamishiro just recited their catchphrase)

I was stunned at the unexpected amount of people he counted, he continued to explain the reason why.

"… The reason is, I rotate between girls a lot basically, that way I can have fun with you when best suits you with the time of month… I guess that's why I like Heavy Rotation so much!" He puffed out his chest - No, that doesn't matter!

"In any case, how did you manage to wiretap one hundred people's rooms?"

"Ahaha, it's easy with my ability. Sneaking into places like the girl's toilets or their dressing room is a piece of cake!"

"Do something else with that piece of cake!"

"Making it nice and creamy, with extra cream!"

(This is all pretty confusing in English but he says doing things before breakfast in Japanese which is like saying it's a piece of cake, so Otonashi tells him to do something else before breakfast. He then says something is growing but I've heard the word he said can be used for ejaculation…)

Aaaah, this is already getting out of hand.

The hand, the leg, the head, the back - It's getting out of everything.

"Let bygones be bygones," the boy wiped away his problems with a simple phrase and started talking about a different subject, "When you big sisters are in a room you sure are noisy, aren't you? Because of that I could barely hear any of the conversation… So, why did Enoshima Junko come visit you? She came because she had an errand for you to run, didn't she?" As he said that, he took out another sweet bread, "Oh, a cub's paw made in Germany!" He looked like he was tasting a rare delicacy as he munched on it.

"Uuum, well that's…" My eyes dropped down to my notebook as I answered him, "It seems she came to give me a hint…"

"Hm? A hint?"

I flipped through my notebook.

"Erm… Enoshima Junko's purpose…"

Kamishiro-kun looked surprised at my words.

"Tell me in more detail. What did Enoshima Junko say her purpose was?" Kamishiro-kun asked with a more forceful voice. I read aloud my memories from my notebook, also feeling very tense.

"It seems like… Enoshima Junko has two purposes… the first is, 'To crush Kamukura Izuru until nothing is left'… do you know what that means?"

"Keep going." He coldly prompted, I looked back down to my notebook.

"Um, the second is…"

I read on ahead a little - and was shocked by what I read.

It was as if someone had killed me by pounding my spine with a hammer, I felt a sudden, intense shock surge through my entire body.

"… Big sis?"

"W-What the hell… It says, 'Kill your beloved darling, Matsuda Yasuke'…"

As soon as I said it, my brain felt like it was having a nuclear meltdown, my surroundings began to rock from side to side. It wasn't an earthquake. I, myself, was the one shaking. My head felt hot, unavoidably so, only my body was cold. I was stricken by the less familiar feelings of fear and anger all at once. I was shaking violently for reasons I could not understand.

"… Calm down, big sis."

The inside of my head was numb with fear, there was a voice echoing quietly. I was brought back to my senses to find Kamishiro-kun saying something to me.

"The kill thing has to be a bluff… There's no way a person can kill so lightly. If she really planned to kill him, she wouldn't bother declaring it to you until long after murdering him. Am I right?"

That would be true. I know that. But I can't stop my body from shaking.

"Y-y-y-you're r-r-r-right-t t-t-there's-s n-n-n-no w-w-way s-s-s-s-s-she'd-d k-k-k-kill h-h-h-him." My voice was shaking so much, I almost couldn't form a single word.

"… In the meantime, it might be better for you to just not say anything until you calm down," He said lazily as he gulped down the bread in his hand, "Instead, you should listen to my reasoning from now on," He announced loudly, "Ooookay, let's get a move on then!" Kamishiro-kun suddenly straightened his posture, enthusiastically - and he started the reasoning part, "Firstly, there's the problem of 'the advanced notice of Matsuda Yasuke's death' that you're so worried about… I suppose that's a bluff. I mean, there's no sense in telling others about a murder you have yet to commit. She may have been using it as a threat, but that's also unlikely… Hm, it's definitely a bluff. For now, that's our understanding of it. But… we should be more wary of the girl's first purpose."

Enoshima Junko's first purpose.

That's certainly-

"No… Even so, 'Crushing Kamukura Izuru until nothing is left' is… honestly, even I was a little surprised. It's too much of a coincidence, I didn't think I'd hear Kamukura Izuru's name…"

"Wh-wh-who's-s-s t-t-t-that-t?"

"Did you ask, 'Who's that person'?" Kamishiro-kun patted his chest with his hand, "They're the culprit," The boy leaned forward, over the table, and spoke in an excited voice, "I was surprised! Since Kamukura Izuru is the culprit behind The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History!"

Eh? The culprit behind The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History?

Speaking of which, what is The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History?

I tilted my head to the side.

"Wait! I can tell by your reaction that you don't remember!" Kamishiro huffed and pouted, "It's boring to show of my deductions to other big sisters… but from now on I should expect your reaction when I tell you my reasoning," Kamishiro-kun really did look bored as he exhaled deeply, then he began to talk again, "When I told you the other day… you didn't remember then either but… you didn't even bother to ask me whether The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History really happened or not, did you? But now I can say that with more confidence," Kamishiro-kun clicked his fingers right in front of my eyes, "The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History. Kamukura Izuru is the culprit behind the incident," He wore a proud expression as he declared it. After a while of wearing that expression he spoke again, "…That wasn't the reaction I was waiting for."

He said his one sided excuses, as I tried to regain my composure.

"The reason as to why I believe this is the case is also why I called this meeting," Kamishiro leaned over to face my ear and whispered in a small voice, "Actually, I overheard a conversation between faculty members…"

Overheard - somehow that filled me with a sense of dread.

"The people having the conversation were on school campus but they seemed to be very careful, they didn't mind spilling out all their complaints when in their own private rooms though… like after a love affair, it was the no.1 most stale atmosphere. Honestly, those guys from office romances are scary."

"Y-You don't mean…!"

"Oh, it's been a while since you last talked!"

Eh? Was it a while?

No, I wasn't worried about that. More importantly-

"Oh my, As expected, I think the wiretap I installed in the female teaching staff's room has been at least a little useful thus far. We should call this operation, 'The Elite Female Staff Are Set Up With A Dilemma'! Ghuhahahaha!"

"I see… how nice." Understandably, my reaction ended up seeming pretty idiotic.

"In any case, the pieces of the puzzle are starting to come together. The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History, Kamukura Izuru and Enoshima Junko… Once we find what the connection between them is, we'll be able to solve this case."

"So then, it'll only take a little longer?"

"Yeah, just a little…" Kamishiro-kun's expression became shrouded, "Putting it another way, we just need to take one more step… here's my prediction, once we connect one more piece all the secrets will be revealed. If that happens, we'll understand soon afterwards…"

There's only one piece left… ?

"So, are you going to talk to this Kamukura Izuru person? They're the culprit, aren't they?"

Kamishiro-kun made a troubled face, tilting his head to the side at my question.

"Hmmm, I don't think I can. After all, no one knows where they are…"

"Don't know where they are… So they're missing?"

"I wouldn't call it missing per se," Kamishiro-kun's face only became more and more troubled, his tone of voice became more serious, "The human named Kamukura Izuru isn't a member of the regular school, the preparatory school or the teaching staff. In fact, I can't find any mention of that person's name anywhere in Hope's Peak Academy… No boys, no girls, no student graduated or presently attending."

"…Huh?"

No mentions anywhere - it's like they're a ghost.

"I think the most likely possibility is… someone wiped out the record clean… what nasty business. I believe it would have been someone inside the school, but not someone within the inner workings of the school, it's too risky for them."

"So then… there's an accomplice within the school?"

"It's strange though, for as long I have investigated it, I haven't found a single student who knows who the person called Kamukura Izuru is. The school began hiding them after the incident, so it would not be strange if there were students who know about them before the incident… However, I never thought there would be no sign of their existence from the very beginning."

"N-No way… they really are a ghost…"

"S-Stop that! They're not anything like a ghost!" Kamishiro-kun puffed out his cheeks, he looked really mad. Evidently, he disliked the turn the conversation took, "A-Anyway…" Kamishiro-kun cleared his throat slightly, and readjusted his face to a more serious expression as he talked, "No matter what the reason is, if we don't find out who Kamukura Izuru is, we may have no choice but to give up…"

"G-Give up!" I suddenly raised my voice - Kamishiro-kun shook his finger in front of my face with another tsk tsk tsk.

"It's no good to jump to conclusions. As I was saying, we may have no choice but to give up coming at it from that perspective. If we can't figure it out from that perspective, It'll be better to come at it from a different perspective. It's stupid to always look at things from one point of view. For example, if you only ever look at a middle schooler's boobs, you'll never see her ass."

"I see! Thank goodness!" My reasonable reaction turned to an idiotic one and I replied overly cheerfully, "So, what's the other perspective?"

"Enoshima Junko of course!"

Enoshima Junko - we always return to that girl's name, I felt shivers go down my spine.

"Thanks to the conversation I overheard from the female staff, I finally understand. In what way Enoshima Junko is connected to The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History," Kamishiro-kun shot a quick glance to me - Checking my exceedingly weak reaction and he let out a large sigh, "It looks like you don't remember but… other than being 'the person who started the rumour of the incident', it's a mystery as to what other connection she has to The Worst, Largest Incident in Hope's Peak Academy's History. But it's a mystery I've finally cracked. It seems, she's the girl who discovered the incident."

"Discovered it… but isn't that suspicious?"

"Since this is a mystery novel, she's primarily a suspect," said Kamishiro-kun, nodding, "But, you know that, don't you? She's already been interrogated by the school."

"Um… Interrogated…?"

"I told you! If you don't remember check your notebook!" Kamishiro-kun was yelling like he was throwing a huge temper tantrum, I quickly read through my notebook.

"… Ah, I see. Enoshima Junko started to spread rumours immediately following the incident, but didn't you say she was interrogated? But if she was released just after that… then that means she can't be the culprit!"

"Thanks to your awful conversation timing, I've come to a conclusion, big sis… Well, it's just as you put it. It seems like the interrogation was highly relentless, I was thinking it would have been impossible for her to escape-"

Kamishiro-kun suddenly stopped moving.

"What's wrong… ?"

"I see… that's it…" The boy's eyes widened, the corners of his mouth shook and trembled, "I understand now, big sis!" He shrieked excitedly, "We completely overlooked the most important part of it all… It really was best to ask you to help me out, big sis. You did great with the interactive mystery part!"

With uncontrollable excitement, he enthusiastically took another sweet bread out of the paper bag, as he bit into it he started to craft a new sentence - by the way, it was a jam bun.

"What I'm saying is, Enoshima Junko was interrogated by the school… that's where the last piece was hidden!"

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"Well you see, the information I heard while eavesdropping… the interrogation on Enoshima Junko was definitely incredibly thorough, there were things like polygraph testing and kinesics analysis, they started with cliche things like that, then something called 'brain fingerprinting' which is a slightly different to interrogating. But the thing with brain fingerprinting is it seems to be noted as being a more reliable lie detector than compared to the polygraph test… The point is, they were using tests that measured brain waves directly to see if she was lying… understand?"

"Not really… but it sounds incredible."

"That's right! It is incredible!" The corners of Kamishiro-kun's mouth twitched up into a smile, "Not just that but none of it would have been possible without an expert!"

"… An expert?"

"For the interrogation, it seemed the school requested a 'certain student' to assist them. Of course, I couldn't find who the student was but… I finally realized. It would be difficult to utilize something such as 'brain fingerprinting' without an expert in the field, they needed to collaborate with someone… If they knew they would have no reason to imagine it. I'm saying there's someone at this school who is familiar with the intricacies of the brain…"

"Eh… ?" At that exact moment, an awful thought came wandering into my head. I didn't want it to come true, so I quickly tried to think of something else to distract me.

It has nothing t-

"You know him, big sis, he's the 'Super High School Level Neurologist', Matsuda Yasuke!"

I heard something that sounded a short fuse behind my ear - my brain was drawing a blank.

"With the 'death notice' from earlier, I thought there was no mistaking there was a connection between Enoshima Junko and Matsuda Yasuke but… perhaps, Matsuda knew Enoshima's weakness. Anyway, there must be a reason behind their connection, right? The school released Enoshima Junko from the interrogation way too easily!" He continued to talk on, with his eyes shining brightly, I found myself nodding in agreement to everything he said.

After he had spoken for approximately an age and a day, I couldn't help but feel as though I had no energy remaining. Even so, Kamishiro-kun continued to talk. In contrast to his happy talkative nature, I was looked depressed at best.

"… The point being, I can't help but feel as though Matsuda Yasuke may have been 'the hidden last piece', you know? I mean, do you think Enoshima Junko has been just obsessively aiming at the good relationship between Matsuda and yourself? Hey, if it really is how I think it is, then don't you think that's the connection?"

I'm not really thinking anything - I don't know anything.

I don't even know how the conversation turned to Matsuda-kun in the first place.

I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

I don't know about these overwhelming reasons, it's impossible that everything has a reason behind it - I stopped writing in my notebook.

Because my self-defence is working.

If something came and threatened my world, I'd be happier if I just forgot about it. Because if I forget about it, that means I have nothing to do with it - and it protects my world.

So, I'll look away from life's inconveniences and misfortunes. I'll chase after my world with all the strength I carry. I've cast away my feelings of self-hatred and guilt. Because I'll always forget, whether or not I turn away from the truth.

And so, I have nothing to do with the things I forget -

That's my self-defense.

"… Yeah, I really do feel like we'll solve this soon."

I suddenly realised, as Kamishiro-kun continued to talk to himself, he was drawing nonsense shapes on top of the table.

"Say, big sis… It seems like the end to your issue is coming soon too. After I solve it, it'll be time for you to get ready to reward me. Polish that fine-ass body. I like to imagine that despite your cute face, at night you're really the Aburenbou Shougun, aren't you? Is that it? I bet you are."

After he finished his one-sided conversation, he got up from his chair, though it looked more like he was jumping up and down on it.

"Alright! We're on the home run now!" After yelling out an encouraging shout, he turned around, "I'm sure, next time we meet, big sis, I'll have solved this case!"

As he waved his hand, Kamishiro-kun departed from the table. However, after only walking a few steps, he stopped.

"Oh, right, right," He looked back, with an expression that told me he had remembered something, "If you don't want to be sitting around doing nothing, you could look into Matsuda Yasuke's small problem. Well, it doesn't matter how much you look into it, he won't be killed or anything but… I thought it would be good to mention it just in case. Still, I don't know what sort of secret connection Matsuda Yasuke and Enoshima Junko have, but it's better to be careful."

Secret connection?

Enoshima-san and Matsuda-kun - have a secret connection?

What the heck?

What the heck? What the heck? What the heck? What the heck? What the heck? What the heck? What the heck?

I was attacked by a wave of anxiety, my chest tightened in pain, I felt scared of everything, I was just exhausted.

"… Anyway, it's about time we reached the climax - You should get ready, big sis, anything could happen."

Kamishiro-kun finished his warning and turned away, this time he disappeared into the school cafeteria's crowd like a ghost.

Thus, I was left alone in the school cafeteria. I was still feeling exhausted, for the time being I decided on just concentrating on taking several deep breaths. There was no reason for it. I was simply stalling time. The time to solve the mystery. Time always relentlessly continued in a steady stream. That's why I spent this time taking in deep breaths.

And I forgot.

I forgot everything, perfectly.

Very soon, I couldn't remember why I was taking in such deep breaths, how strange.

"Well, whatever!"

There was no more that I could forget. From that point on I was bright, cheerful and brimming with positivity. Without so much as a backward glance, I walked to the future, filled with hope. I picked up my notebook from the surface of the table, and with plenty of momentum, I stood from my chair and-

"… Huh?"

I felt lightheaded - or maybe a little different to that.

I suddenly grabbed the table with my hand.

I looked to where I was looking previously, the words in my notebook danced around the page, distorting themselves. At that moment, I shivered and felt like a horde of insects was crawling up my back, my knees buckled, I thought briefly about what was happening and soon found I was sitting on the chair again.

The inside of my head was stained with a metallic grey, my mind was completely blank.

I'm tired.

My eyelids became heavy, and my face slackened, the world circling me was quickly disappearing. The busy, noisy students around me were vanishing, the human shapes surrounding me were all melting together.

It was as if I had been poisoned or hypnotised, I couldn't move a single finger.

It was in that complete stillness, that I suddenly heard a voice.

"Upupu."

What an ominous laugh.

It was strange, yet sounded so familiar.

"What's this? Did you actually remember me? I'm happy! Despite your awful habit of forgetting things you still remembered me… That's right, it's 'Super High School Level Despair'. It's been a while, upupupu."

Why can I remember?

Why did I remember them?

Even so I remembered someone. Before, this voice told me something.

Let's meet up again! Then I'll kill you properly!

Suddenly I was looking upwards, before my eyes was a giant shadow standing over me. The shadow had a familiar face. But I couldn't recall any memory of the face. That familiar face stared intensely at me, like it was trying to look past my skin. Their irises were coloured by darkness itself. It was like their eyes were despairing, even in despair. As I looked into these eyes, an unexpected thought popped into my head.

Ah, so I'll be killed by these eyes.

"Hmmm. Unfortunately I can't actually kill you this time either." they whispered to me, like they were answering my thoughts, "Once again, I can't kill you due to circumstances. Since you still haven't tasted enough despair. You need to taste an even more despair-inducing despair, you see!"

Suddenly, all the light surrounding me disappeared. At the same time, I noticed my eyelids were shut. The shadow seemed to cover my face completely.

"But, if you say you don't want to taste that despair… then it means war. If you don't fight despair, you'll never feel hope again."

Those were the last words I heard.

After that voices, sounds, everything had disappeared. As numbness took hold of my body, all my senses stopped working. I was completely still, I fell out of consciousness.

I fell out of it silently.

CHAPTER 6

The man walked to the girl's room quickly, it was clear the girl had not bothered to take the key from her door earlier. Despite this, there was no one inside the room. He swiftly opened the door, letting a rush of air into the room. Inside the room there was a poster on the wall which flapped noisily.

"… Why, why did she have to be out now?" He had told her to stay put, even when she had nothing to do - without realising it he felt like shouting obscenities at her.

That being said, the man had fully realised that there would have been no sense to be drawn from his words if he had done so. No matter what he said to her - that girl would just forget everything.

Letting out a large sigh, Matsuda Yasuke dropped his line of sight to where his hands were. His hands remained scrunched into tight fists. No matter how many times he tried to relax them, it was impossible. He had lost feeling in them long before, he could still feel Murasame Soushun's neck squeezed between his hands.

Murasame Soushun's sore, red eyes flashed through his mind suddenly. He squeezed his fists more - it was like his hands were still wrapped around the boy's neck, suffocating him of air.

"Why… did she have to be out now…?" He whispered in a much weaker tone than before as he left the room.

He exited the dormitory and soon Matsuda found himself heading towards the biology building in the east district. If he were her then he would be there. There wouldn't be another place a girl who had forgotten everything would be.

It wasn't even the height of summer yet but already the back of Matsuda's dirty shirt was drenched in sweat. Covered in perspiration, he felt like he was as heavy as lead. It should have taken around ten minutes to reach the biology building on a normal day, but this time it took at least twice the amount of time.

Even so, Matsuda somehow finally reached the biology building. Looking like a broken wind-up toy, he scaled the stairs in a strange, awkward waddle and within a few minutes was standing in front of the neurology research facility.

As he took a deep breath in he roughly opened the door.

He looked into the room with hope.

However, there was no one there.

It was still too early to be discouraged by this but an uncomfortable feeling stirred in him.

What happened here?

It had not been hidden well, there were traces of vandalism in there, on the desk, on the bed, all over the laboratory.

Don't tell me…

His expression changed as he quickly hurried over to the bed - Something moved under it, as if it had anticipated his actions.

"Who's there?!" As he instinctively raise his voice, he reached down and raised the bed sheet…

He saw a girl under the bed.

Matsuda felt his stab of anxiety ease with some relief. But within the next moment, that relief was blown away, like an explosion. Matsuda saw the bed thrown into the air. It drifted through the air, looking as though it was much lighter than what it truly was and soon began to spin around in a dizzying motion. After spun for an inconceivable amount of time it finally fell to the ground, like gravity had at last remembered it existed. The bed sheets, still in Matsuda's hand and flipped upwards and lightly grazed against his nose and floated back down to the ground.

A deep rumbling echoed through the room.

After the rumbling had come to a stop, Matsuda heard a voice, or more specifically, Matsuda heard a laugh.

"Ahahah

"Nothing really. I don't want to do anything."

"… What?"

"It's too late, I shan't do a thing. I'm not going to do a single thing, I have everyone else doing it for me. Guys like the student council, the headmaster or the steering committee… and also that girl who you absolutely adore… EEEEVERYONE is running around, doing my work."

Hearing that, Matsuda's face went dark red.

"You already know? What I'm doing…?"

"Whatever are you saying?" Enoshima raised her head, Matsuda looked down at her, "I've known what you were doing for a very long time now… You've been doing exactly as I intended you to do, so what are you saying? Hey, won't you tell me?"

Matsuda clenched his jaw at her words. Seeing that, Enoshima quivered with an ecstatic look stuck to her face.

"Ahem… Matsuda-kun's face sure is amazing right now. That despair-induced face you're showing me, I'd like to see it more. Become more and more and more and more despair-induced!"

"Fuck… off…" Matsuda's face contorted into rage.

Watching him, Enoshima snorted and chuckled, she placed her hands behind her back as she casually inspected her surroundings.

"Moving on though… Matsuda-kun, what is it you plan to do from now on?"

"… What do you mean?" He immediately responded.

Enoshima suddenly reached out and grabbed Matsuda's wrist.

"Oh no, your hand is wounded. You weren't scratched were you? It's looks painful. Should I kiss it better?"

Matsuda quickly tried to pull away his hand but Enoshima held on tightly.

"Now let's see, these scratches were caused by some other guy, weren't they? It looks like he was probably an honour student. But he was terribly ill, and when he made this wound he was probably bedridden with shock, wasn't he?"

"How… do you know that…?"

"I don't know, I just understand. Because it was all part of my plan," Enoshima brought her own face close to Matsuda's pale face and grinned crazily, "Upupupu, gotcha, just kidding!" She then released Matsuda's hand and once again observed her surroundings,

"Still, I'm sure there's a precious existence you want to protect. That's right, this is disturbingly similar to that thing with your mother, you must feel awful, sorry… Oh, speaking of your mother, I can't help but feel that Otonashi Ryouko-chan looks just like her… you know, they have the same kind of atmosphere and stuff. I wonder if they shared some sort of connection or similarity to each other. Or maybe you're the connection? I don't know if it's intentional or not, but it's nice that your friend is so forgetful, just like your mother. I gotta say, it seems like guys today are really into MILFs, you especially seem to like those MILFs who forget their own miserable backstory…"

As she turned to Matsuda, Enoshima looked up at him persistently. She happily bounced, walking around him over and over again.

"That's why, you wanted to protect her well this time. I get it, you feel sorry for her… even so, you're troubled. You're incredibly troubled. That's what it seems like after what I've been hearing…" Enoshima stood in front of Matsuda, she glared more intensely at him, "For real though, what do you plan to do from now on?"

Matsuda opened his mouth, trying to find words to say only to close it again. His pale lips trembled a little but he could only muster a glare directed back at Enoshima. Enoshima looked like she had been expecting his reaction and she began to walk quietly again.

"I suppose it can't be helped, oh dear. I'll just have to think about this one a little harder…" However immediately after she said that she stopped walking, "… D-Don't get me wrong or anything!" She yelled out as she went bright red with embarrasment, "I… I don't really… mind if you don't care about it… still, it's up to me, even though I'm unreliable… a-and I can't just leave it be!"

He didn't understand the reasons why.

Enoshima changed her personality with no context, Matsuda wasn't able to follow along with the conversation's direction at all. She paid no mind to his reaction at all and started to walk around again as if nothing had happened.

"Well, I DID say I'd have to think about this for a bit, but really there's only one way to go about things…" Enoshima circled around Matsuda as his eyes followed her and she continued in a very straightforward tone, "… It's Kamukura Izuru. No matter what happens, he'll end up with the blame. He ran away, and that's fine since he's the cause of the incident they call the Worst and Largest in Hope's Peak Academy's History. In that case it should be easy to fix the issue with the student council president, and the issue with the guys from the steering committee. Those guys are just trying to cover it up again anyway."

Hearing her words, Matsuda muttered inside his head, "I knew it. Still, if that guy said what he thought was true, then that means… it just makes less and less sense."

"Just tell me… what are you trying to achieve… ?" Matsuda asked.

"You know what!! I told you before, didn't I? I'm not trying to do anything!" She screamed in a high pitched voice, and then laughed it off, "I'm just leaving this interesting tea party. I've had enough interrupting things. Right now, I'm just existing as a c-list character, I don't do anything else!"

He didn't know if her words were truly her honest feelings on the matter. No matter how many times she could repeat herself, he probably never would know - Matsuda understood that at least.

"Well, in the end it's all up to you. I don't really care what you do with this situation… Yeah, do whatever you like. Because I'll accept whatever ending we come to," Enoshima stopped walking. She stood in front of Matsuda and turned to the boy before posing another question, "So, what will you do? It is all dependent on whether you go along with it or not, isn't it?"

Although Matsuda had understood what she was saying, Matsuda had to ask her something

"… You know where this Kamukura guy's whereabouts are?"

"Nope, not a clue." Enoshima quickly shook her head. Matsuda frowned.

"But you said Kamukura would get the blame and nothi-"

"Just relax about it! It'll all be clear soon enough!" She interrupted him in a high pitched voice, "I know where the guys who know where Kamukura is are and what they're doing. Soon I'll know where Kamukura is too!"

"The steering committee… ?"

"Ding dong, correct!" Enoshima announced with a cocky attitude, "If you heard it from those guys, then Kamukura's whereabouts should be easy enough to work it out."

"…but, even if they did that doesn't mean I know where he is, right?"

Enoshima remained with a cocky attitude but her voice and deepened.

"… That's right. It doesn't mean that…" At that moment, the girl's expression slipped and her face deadpanned, like she had lost interest in everything, "But, perhaps that is not such a big deal… I mean, if those guys don't say then that just means Kamukura's whereabouts remain unknown, your plan will fail and I'll be ruined. But, that's all that will happen, so you shouldn't pay too much mind to it…"

As she muttered in a monotone voice, Enoshima turned to the window and walked towards it. Her eyes filled with melancholy as she leaned against the window and stared outside. The laboratory overlooked the east district's courtyard - and the preparatory school's parade.

"… You're talking as if it doesn't matter if I fail." Matsuda raised his voice in a puzzled tone and looked towards Enoshima's back.

"Because it doesn't matter," The girl continued to stare out the window and laughed absentmindedly, "In private, I would always think something along the lines of how despair-inducingly wonderful it must be to put an end to something as insignificant as small fish…"

She said things that she never meant to say, her words were a reflection of her true feelings that lay in her heart. Then that means-

"… You really are weird."

"Ah, soz, soz! You don't like that, do you?" Enoshima looked back and had an innocent smile on her face as if he was mistaken.

She had the face of a devil one moment and in the next she smiled like an angel. She hadn't intended to make either face. That's why he continued to shake as he talked with the girl. He felt more than exhausted.

"That's right, for that girl's sake it's not like you can lose." Her pure and innocent smile remaining on her face, Enoshima turned and walked silently to Matsuda, "Upupu. You really are someone who's in true love. You're prepared to fight for your love. I bet when they say 'love is blind' they were thinking of you… Ah, that doesn't mean you do stupid things, actually I'm grateful. You're destined to spend an eternity with that person, so I thank you from the very bottom of my heart."

Enoshima walked up to Matsuda and didn't come to a stop until finally their toes were touching. She whispered gently to him.

"Do your best, Matsuda-kun. Because that's what I expect. Defeat the despair you face and let hope win, shining victorious… Because that's what I expect will happen."

As she whispered quietly, Enoshima leaned towards him until their faces almost touched. And she then leaned in more.

In the next moment, their lips touched.

Matsuda didn't break away. He was puzzled but he gave up and just accepted it as it was.

It was vicious, long, entwining, violent kiss.

After a time that was far too long to be described in a single word, Enoshima finally pulled away. In the moments after the kiss she backed away from him and in dead silence she walked to the laboratory door.

"… Where are you going?" Matsuda asked as he wiped his mouth.

"Hm, in return for the kiss I thought I'd lend you a bit of a hand." Said Enoshima laughing, but she quickly stopped.

Wait.

You don't need to go out of your way.

But his mouth wouldn't move. No, it wasn't just his mouth, his entire body felt numb and was immobile.

"Upupu. Looks like you were caught by such a classic too, Matsuda-kun…"

Looking at the frozen Matsuda, Enoshima looked like she was a kid who had just gotten a beloved toy. She was smiling, overcome by joy.

"You know, lipstick is a dangerous thing! My lipstick, for example, has been tainted with poison! Ahaha, poison! It just sounds like a classic, so nostalgic! Ah, but don't worry. It's not life threatening!"

Enoshima happily bounced around Matsuda's still form. Knowing her plan worked, she proudly let her joy show. She finally let herself bounce in front of Matsuda.

"Now then, I should give you one final piece of advice!" Enoshima suddenly switched to a serious expression, like a boxer moments before the bell rings, "You know, in this scenario, only you can make the choice, Matsuda-kun. So think carefully, worry about it, and choose the choice you think it best. Hope or despair… the choices are so diverse and yet, surprisingly, intricately connected. Anyway, have a good think about it… um, think… Aah, it's no good. I'm tired now. I wonder if this conversation is just that tedious… Well, whatever. In any case, that's our conversation for now… goodbye."

She bought the one-sided conversation she had started to a one-sided end. Enoshima staggered out of the lab.

WAIT!

Despite yelling it out, no sound escaped Matsuda's mouth.

The boy stood, paralyzed. Waiting for feeling to return to his body.

CHAPTER 7

It was at that moment that I woke up, out of the blue.

As my consciousness returned to me, I couldn't help but feel completely refreshed and-

"Ahh, thank goodness!" I said, without realizing.

For a long time perhaps, I was having an awful nightmare. But that's over now. I was finally free of my long-lasting nightmare… or maybe not.

Somehow, it felt like this place also belonged in my nightmare. Because if that wasn't the case, then why else would I be in this room?

The walls, the ceiling, the floor, everything was covered with concrete. I couldn't see any doors or windows.

So, why would I be in such a strange room?

"Where… am I…?"

At least I was certain this place wasn't my room. No matter how forgetful I could get, I know I would never live in such an eerie room without a good reason for doing so.

"Don't tell me… I've been arrested, or something…"

Arrested, my words bounced off the cold, grey concrete. I thought I could hear a man coming to my room, stamping his feet with a thumping sound. It was really just the monster we've come to call 'loneliness'.

I can't find the exit!

It was that time I sat up quickly - I realized I had been sleeping on a bed. The bed had a pretty pink, princess-style canopy with an antique feel that little girls everywhere would have wanted, but oddly enough, it was standing alone in the middle of a bare concrete room.

The contrast between the delicate decorations of the bed and the bare minimum on the walls only added to the overall creepiness of the room. In addition, there were other parts of the room that were missing altogether. If this room was perfectly complete, then it would have a furniture, and a door, but this room was absolutely missing those factors. As I quickly finished analyzing my surroundings quickly, the monster I spoke of earlier began to get to work. My fear and anxiety felt like it turned to pitch black tar, and it felt as though it wanted to steal my freedom of movement.

"Ooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooh…" A moan snuck past my shaking and trembling lips. The room's outline and shape started to slowly distort. Tears began to appear in my eyes. But, it's no use crying over this situation. It's no use to cry. I held out for dear life and despite my intention to hold them back, the tears that had gathered in my eyes began spilling out, good morning, madam.

"Eh?"

Startled, I realised there was a female maid standing next to the wall.

"Good morning, madam!"

A voice came from it, it really is a girl. I could see the girl's face behind her clothes. But only the face of her mask. Due to her mask I couldn't determine her actual appearance.

The mask in question was an eerie bear mask which filled me with bad feelings.

The right half was a white, cute bear.

The left half was a black, evil bear.

The girl wearing maid clothing faced me and spoke to me in a happy tone.

"Good morning. Madam! I have prepared some tea for your morning routine!"

"Umm, uh… I don't think I'm a madam…"

The girl didn't appear to hear me as she simply walked over to me and shoved the silver tray she held onto me. On top of the tray was a teacup with a floral pattern on it. Steam rose from the teacup and disappeared into the air.

"T-Thank you…"

My throat was parched after waking up and was in desperate need of moisture. Forgetting my prior caution, I picked up the teacup and drank the tea in it.

Too cold! Disgusting! It's so weak!

Incredibly, it was a three time loser. The tea was too cold.

Unable to hide my expression, I placed the teacup back on the tray.

"I shall be taking my leave now," The Bear Maid said as she turned on her heel and began to walk somewhere.

"Wait! Where are you going?" I quickly called out.

"Hm? What was that?" As The Bear Maid asked me, she knocked on the wall in front of me. Just like in a ninja temple, after she knocked once, the wall rotated around.

"… Eh, a hidden door…?"

"Ehe! At the time when we built this facility, we wanted it to adhere to Madam's sense of playfulness!"

"T-The playfulness is fine, but I'm leaving!" I raised my voice, feeling desperate.

"Hm?" The bear mask tilted to the side, "Just because… you want to leave doesn't mean you should leave."

"Huh?" This time it was my own face tilting to the side, "Even if I want to leave, I can't… What the hell, am I being confined here…"

"Confined!" A surprised voice echoed off the walls, "C-Confinement… that's… that's a bit of a leap in logic…" The Bear Maid's shoulders shook with laughter, "Just because I appear to be, doesn't mean I am laughing."

"Ah, I didn't…"

"On the contrary, I am filled with sadness beyond compare," Her shoulders shook more, "I am saddened because you are such an interesting person. I'm afraid I cannot make sense of your jokes. As it is currently, I don't think

I'll ever fulfil my dream of having Monobear leaving everything to me. How sad…" The Bear Maid hunched over, looking heartbroken.

"I… I don't think I understand… but for the time being, just how do I get out of here? Can you show me?"

As I prompted the girl, she moved to the hidden door. I looked around the room to find my bag beside my bed.

"… Ah, sorry. Wait a second!"

I quickly got out of the bed and picked up my bag, I felt it's familiar weight. There was no mistaking it was mine.

"Now, time to get out of here!" I said, pushing the bear maid to the side as I left the room of concrete behind me.

What awaited me outside the room was a strange sight, indeed. It was a wide space that looked like a hall, but, just like the previous room, this room's ceiling, walls and floor were all covered in nothing but concrete. However, even though the room itself was wide, the ceiling was very low and it made me feel like I was cooped up. A fluorescent light hung from the ceiling, illuminating the concrete which only added to the bleakness of the room. Inside the room there I counted around 50 legs belonging to school desks, each evenly spaced throughout the room. At every desk there was a person sitting behind it. There were various men and women, all wearing the same school uniform. Furthermore, on their faces they all wore… again, bear masks.

The right half, a white, cute bear.

The left half, a black, evil bear.

"Hey… that bear sure seems popular, doesn't it… ?"

The maid next to me, wearing the same mask answered me.

"That is not a bear, that is Monobear."

Monobear?

I didn't really care about the name at all - All I could see was many men and women, all sitting at school desks, wearing the same school uniform with weird and creepy masks. There was nothing else I could focus on apart from the strange scene in front of me.

Even so I noticed that in front of the Monobear heads, still seated at their desks, were monitors. The Monobear heads all stared at the monitors, almost like they were preparing to eat them. From where I stood I could only see the back of the monitors, I had no idea what kind of video they were playing, all the same they appeared to be focusing all their attention to them. They were motionless, staring patiently at the monitors, with all the vitality of a mannequin. I, on the other hand, felt like I had found myself in an empty graveyard.

"… What are these people?" When I asked timidly, the Monobear Maid answered with a serious tone.

"We are mutants. Everyone is oppressed, and so we barred ourselves away-"

"You had to?"

"We wanted to!"

"Instead of hope?"

"Please pay attention… mutants and such have excellent capabilities, for the most part we have not been oppressed. On the other hand, we believe it would be a waste to not hold back our abilities at least a little. Thus we would like to experience oppression in some form."

I couldn't understand what the girl was saying at all, for the time being I instead tried to change the topic.

"… By the way, I was wondering where this place is."

"I was waiting for that!" The monobear maid answered, in a proud tone, "This is our secret society, of course!"

"Huh? S-Secret society… ?"

Her words seemed too childish and her childishness seemed too unexpected, if anything I doubted her words. I thought perhaps it was some kind of metaphor. But no matter how much I thought about it, I couldn't think of any other meaning for her words. She must have been telling it as it was.

A secret society though! No one does that stuff anymore!

"A secret society for mutants… that's unreasonable!"

"Ehehe, surely you mean unreasonably cool! I should mention, us mutants all belong to the preparatory school. This is the preparatory school's secret society!"

"… The preparatory school?" Finally, something I could believe was true. I felt like she had left an important clue in her conversation, so I took 'Otonashi Ryouko's Memory Notebook' out of my bag and looked for any memories about the 'preparatory school'.

I found it. I remembered.

The preparatory school isI don't really know.

All I had written in my notebook was that it existed, and nothing else. It couldn't be helped, I would have to ask about it straight up.

"… Um, have the people from the the preparatory school always known about this?"

"Not always. If we imposed, then our secret society wouldn't be so secret anymore. A secret society must act as a secret society, and so must move as a secret society!"

"But, isn't it still imposing to create a base here… you can't keep it a secret, can you?"

"I must insist you refrain from saying such strange things!" The Monobear Maid suddenly sounded angry, "I have yet to hear anyone claim of our existence! Here in the basement beneath the west district we have quietly, and silently created our secret society, do you understand?"

"… Eh? The west district?"

"It is most suitable for the secret society. Due to the fact that the reserve students and staff are located in the west district, it means the regular staff do not visit anywhere near as much as they would otherwise. Furthermore, there is very little extracurricular activity here and clubs meet at the club rooms, and also this is the basement of a club room belonging to a now inactive mystery study group… that makes it more opportune!"

In the west district, beneath an abandoned club room belonging to an inactive mystery study group, there is a basement.

And that's this place?

I looked around again. There was a slight feeling of being trapped within such a wide hall, even so there were several doors throughout the hall's walls, there seemed to be another small room at the back of the hall. Across the hall, diagonal to me, I saw the entrance to another passageway. It looked to be a fairly long one at that. I couldn't see the end of it at all.

"… Can such a large basement really be underground here?"

"You don't believe me?" The Monobear Maid asked, suppressing her laugh, "It seems to be so much easier to not believe me… that's why it isn't despairing."

"Despair…" As I said that, I could feel something in the depths of my heart become uneasy. What a foul word. Instead I tried to shake off that word quickly and ask a question which had appeared in my head.

"A-Anyway, I understand that you're a secret society… and I understand that this is your secret base but… why are you a secret society to begin with… ?"

The Monobear Maid looked surprised, before answering me in a straightforward manner.

"The parade."

I muttered quietly as I flicked through my notebook, "Um, the parade is… a demonstration from the reserve students who felt dissatisfied with Hope Peak Academy's education system… right?"

"It is not a demonstration. It is a revolution." The girl corrected me with much force.

"… Eh?"

"Upupu. It's so exciting! It's a revolution to change Hope's Peak Academy and the world. My heart's racing just thinking about it!"

A revolution?

What did this person just say?

"And so, in order to complete our revolution, we must destroy Hope's Peak Academy's perfect little fantasy world. This school pushes for hope too much, all the while it torments and harrasses its surroundings. If this continues, this school's 'Super High School Level Hope' will never be crushed and-"

"Ah, wait a second!" I interrupted the Monobear Maid. There were a few words I missed for some reason, "What's… Super High School Level Hope?"

"Oh ho," the Monobear Maid raised her voice in exclamation, "You are trying to test me with your words, aren't you? That's quite alright, I'll answer your question in a flawless manner!"

I wonder why she's taking so much time to talk about such an apparently important matter. I mean, if their society is so secret, then they shouldn't have to bother keeping secrets, right?

But, with all this extra, unnecessary speech she used - she seemed very happy that someone was listening to her story.

"Ahem, Super High School Level Hope is the absolute talent which surpasses all other talent, a genius among geniuses. The pinnacle of human evolution, so to speak. Yes, that is Super High School Level Hope. Ta daaaaaa, that was my flawless explanation!"

"Ah, sorry… I stopped paying attention…"

"Eh? Seriously?" The Monobear Maid looked shocked, "O-oh… anyway…" The girl crossed her arms and after some groaning she continued, "I'm ready now!"

It seems like she's ready now!

"The 'hope' we use in Super High School Level Hope's meaning is a little different from the everyday use of the word, 'hope'. What we call 'hope' refers to 'a talent so great, it can be called the hope of humanity'. In other words, what we call 'Super High School Level Hope' is the owner of the most superior talent."

"So then, you mean an incredible genius?"

"But talented in every way possible."

"A perfect superhuman… but isn't that cheating?"

"Well, I suppose it does sound unbelievable!" The Monobear Maid's tone changed to a mildly offended one, "Like the setting out of a make-believe story. Hope's Peak Academy's mascot has been given so much goddamn VIP treatment that they're on a platter outside of our reach… Ah, it'd be cheating by anyone's standards!"

"… Aren't you angry?"

"I have not yet decideeEED!" Despite her words, the Monobear Maid's entire body seemed to be overcome by anger, "We'll be going against Hope's Peak Academy's research and nurturing of 'Super High School Level Hope', it seems to have a large budget. Even so, it's existence is hidden even to the student body! We do not know the details as to whether it is in fact a classified project but, it is entirely frustrating. I admit it, it's more frustrating than anything I have ever experienced! That research funding is being taken out of the preparatory school's precious budget. This school is literally stealing our money and our hope, and devoting it entirely to 'Super High School Level Hope'. They're using us as a launch pad for their stupid little make-believe story…Is that what this school calls hope? If it's for the sake of that ultimate talent, they don't care what we have to say about it? Is it not worth to even think about those with no talent? Well? WELL?!"

"C-Calm down a little-" … or not.

"Stop joking the hell around!! For god's sake just what is hope?!" The girl refused to even listen to me, "Aren't people chosen by talent so goddamn great? And the people who wait, aren't they great too? What bullshit! That's not fair, that's just elitist! It's fine if all us useless earthlings die just for the sake of those celestial few, isn't it? Right?! I'm right, aren't I? Oi!"

There was no longer any way for me to stop her onslaught of verbal abuse.

"Bullshit! That hope that they praise as being so mighty is covered in bullshit! Every little bit of hope in this school is covered in bullshit! Oh, incoming! The festival of shit is on it's way! Shit! SHIT! BULLSHIIIIIT!!"

Her words overflowed with nothing but hatred. Her hatred was not half-baked either, it was a hatred like a deadly poison. She seemed to be referring to not just 'Super High School Level Hope', but also Hope's Peak Academy itself and furthermore, the very concept of 'Hope'… etc. I wrote all this in my notebook but soon my hand came to a stop.

Huh?

I returned my attention to the notebook.

Originally - Is what I would say, considering this notebook fundamentally acts as my memory.

Originally, I was suspended from school. It also mentions Super High School Level Hope, the parade, the preparatory school and Hope's Peak Academy -

Huh, but this has nothing to do with me.

This has absolutely nothing to do with Otonashi Ryouko.

"This has… nothing to do with me…" I said so quietly I doubted it was audible to anyone. My words sounded so dry, it was like a desert, it had seeded itself deep inside me, "… W-What do I have to do?"

The Monobear Maid took a deep breath and looked shyly to me. She looked like she had finally calmed down.

"Hmm, nothing."

That's right, since this situation has nothing to do with me. So then, I should quickly escape from this place that also has nothing to do with me.

"… Hey, do you happen to know where to bathroom is? I need to excuse myself for a moment."

"Eh? Is it a number one or a number two?"

"… Do I really need to announce myself before going?"

"No, but you see, we only have one bathroom, so if someone were to use it for a number two than it would have disastrous consequences for others who wish to make use of it. It's Die Hard! It's Die no Daibouken! It's Die In Cries!!"

"Oh, okay! For now I'll just go to the bathroom!" I said, and began to run like I was escaping. Well to put it more exactly, I was running, while actually planning to escape. More importantly, there was no real sense for me to be in this place because it had nothing to do with me!

"Ah, it's at the end of the hall. Are you fine without a map?" The Monobear Maid called out as I ran away.

The end of the hall?

As I heard her, I could see the end of the hall growing closer and closer.

I fled to the other side of the hall, between the monobear heads who were still at their desks. They didn't even bother to glance at me. Their eyes were still plastered to the monitors in front of them.

Just what is it they're so engrossed in?

I knew it had nothing to do with me, but curiosity had taken over my otherwise calm appearance - so I looked back.

"Huh… ?"

It was completely black. Every monitor was a pitch black, none had a single image projecting on it.

"It'll… start again soon… so…" the monobear heads sitting in front of me said in monotone. "Phase one has just ended… Phase two is now beginning…"

Interrupting the robotic words being spoken in unison, the monitors all lit up.

Hope's Peak Academy presents,

Young people, test the true extent of your 'hope' to win!

You've all proved yourselves to be more talented than anyone else!

For 'your own hope' you must kill more than anyone else has!

The final exam of mutual killing has now begun! (Phase two)

It used a lot of flashing words, taking up the full screen, even the local television stations refused to use it to such an extent nowadays.

What the heck?

Such a question appeared in my head for a moment, but it was truly only for a moment. The image on the screens changed, it changed toRed.

It was almost like each monitor had been completely covered in bright red cellophane. I looked closely and in the red I saw something wriggle. What seemed to be a person, I suppose.

In the room of red, the walls and floor were dyed crimson. I couldn't make out distinct features but a body covered in red rising from the ground, wriggling and writhing like a worm. The camera captured it all in birds eye view. At first I thought it was some sort of avant-garde dance or obscure video art but I soon realised that was not the case. Immediately afterwards, the stumbling person wandered to both sides of the screen. The clothing he wore was almost completely covered in blood. Even so, I could tell it was a uniform from Hope's Peak Academy. As the man dragged a foldable chair loosely behind him, someone was begging on his hands and feet before him, the man passed the foldable chair to his other hand and swung it up. When it was over the top of his head, he swung it down and, huh?

I couldn't grasp what had just happened, I just continued to stare at the monitor, dumbfounded.

The foldable chair was swung down an innumerable amount of times. He continued to swing it down on the groveling man without hesitation. The camera's angle changed and showed the face of the man swinging the chair close up. He seemed to be shouting something over and over again.

"Ah, turn up…. the sound…"

The Monobear Heads sitting in front of me turned up the volume on his monitor.

I could hear his yells emitted from the monitor. His voiced only grew louder and became heart wrenching screams.

"… I-I, DON'T, WANT, TO, DIE!!"

Apart from the anguished cries, I could hear another sound ringing out.

Squelch. Splat.

It sounded like yoghurt and cartilage being mashed together, every time the man swung down the chair, a sound would ring out.

"I-I'M!" Squish. "… NOT BAD!!" Splat. " IT'S NOT, MY FAULT!!" Slosh. "S-SO!" Squelsh. "I'M NOT, BAD!!" Sque-At that point the foldable chair broke.

But, the boy groveling in front of him was long past broken. His head was beyond recognition, instead looking like a squashed tomato someone had dropped, around it was a mixture of blood and brain fluid. I was beyond the ability to adequately communicate my level of horror. In the monitor the skull was split open and the corpse was spilling out it's fluids. I couldn't look away from the body, I couldn't even move at all. I stared at the monitor, stunned, and totally dumbfounded.

"… T-T-That's, enough," the man in the monitor said to himself a he shook and trembled. "I-I've already killed those other two… that, s-should be, enou-"

The boy's words were interrupted by the sound of thick glass breaking. Before he could come to his senses, another man stood behind him with a bottle in his hand. Without warning, the newcomer beat the first man down with a single blow aimed at his head.

"AAH… AAaaaaaAAAAaaAAaaAAaaaaAAAAAAAAAHHHH!" As the man clutched desperately at his face with both hands, he roared out like a wounded animal. Suddenly, with some abruptness, he ran from the room, thrashing in agony.

"W… wait, WAIT!!" The ambusher tailed after him with unsteady steps.

The image on the screen once again changed. Instead, it now showed a corridor. In the corridor was a running man whose face was drenched in blood. Small pieces of glass had embedded themselves into his eyes and caused them to bleed.

"S-S-SAAAAAAAAVVENMMMEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEHH!!!" He screamed out in a slurred voice. His mouth seemed to open and morph into the shape of a grin, but of course, that was not the case. His lips were torn open and he was not long able to close them. Standing in the front of him was a trembling girl.

The girl stood alone in the gloomy corridor, holding a cleaver tightly in her hands. Her creepy appearance filled even me with fear, however, the man running didn't even see her. As he screamed in pain, he ran towards her.

As the girl readied herself into a defensive position, she thrusted her cleaver up. At that moment, the boy swung down his head.

Squelch.

The cleaver sunk into his skull on impact, the shards of glass stuck in his eyes were thrown out. The man continued to run forwards for a few steps before finally collapsing. As the girl's entire body shook and trembled violently, she patiently stared at the corpse.

"I-I d-d-don't… want t-to d-d-die…I ha-had to…" The volume on the monitor wavered with her trembling voice. Behind her, I could see the figure of another high school student with an iron pipe in his hand, sneaking towards her.

I finally managed to look away.

It was nothing but a movie made in bad taste - in ridiculously bad taste. This was some sort of video the reserve students had made, right? In that case, it really was scary. More than just scary-it was bursting with realism.

The 'dead' people were an image that could be associated with 'cold' which in turn could be associated easily with the illusion of 'death'. The warm blood seeping from the bodies of those dead is incomparable to the heat emitted from their bodies during the time of their life, it fogged up the lens on the camera with the humidity. It was like an immense heat that followed death.

But, just what on earth is going on, it's just so-

"Insignificant, isn't it… ?" Much to my surprise, one of the Monobear Heads sitting in front of me, still staring at a monitor asked me, "… This is hope? This thing is hope?"

The boy murmured, sounding honestly uninterested. He spoke, sounding completely immersed in despair.

"At some time in their life everyone will come to a point where they only think of themselves… and so, it's mutual killing… up until this point, people would say it's important to have hope… and so they'll do anything to protect it…people like us have abandoned that nasty habit… After all, it's just an insignificant little thing…"

He seemed irritated at his own words. His irritation only became more apparent as he spoke, suddenly he began to breathe heavily.

"… Um, how long have you been watching this? Always?"

"Not always. We've only seen it 5818 times…"

Did he say… 5818 times, huh?

I felt sweat run down my already soaked back. No matter how many times someone could say this video was fake, it continued to replay through my head. Despite only watching it once, my brain seemed inclined to believe it was real.

This really is something I shouldn't get myself involved in.

I have to escape right now!

I raised my line of sight up until I met someone else's eyes. On the other side of the hall, the Monobear Maid looked at me with patient eyes, she waved with her hand. I only felt more tempted to run away.

I felt chills rise up through my spine. As if trying to run from the video that tormented my mind, I dived into the passage at the back of the hall. The sound of my footsteps echoed through the dark corridor. Once again, the walls, floor and ceiling were all covered in concrete.

Concrete, concrete, concrete, concrete!

This passageway was covered in concrete too, it didn't seem wide enough for more than one adult to fit in. I felt an overwhelming sense of claustrophobia. The only light I saw was the dim, concealed lighting that illuminated my feet, the space was overcome by a strange atmosphere.

I ran down the passageway and suddenly I realised I had not idea why I was running down a passageway, anxiety took hold of me. I continued to run down this endless passageway for what felt like a lifetime for me. As I ran through the passageway all that appeared in my mind was how much I wanted to get out of it.

My feet suddenly stopped moving.

In front of me, another concrete wall stood in my way. It seems like I reached a dead end. To both my left and my right were bare, concrete walls. But, on the concrete wall in front of me, I saw a door leading to another small passageway.

Is this the exit?

Holding that belief in my heart, I reached out to the door with my hand. It didn't need a key or anything, the door opened easily. I peeked behind the it with high hopes.

I felt a bout of deja vu.

Just more concrete. It was a small room with its walls, floor and ceiling all covered in concrete. But, at the back of the room was a bizarre spectacle.

Two parallel sets of iron bars.

A jail cell?

I walked forward carefully and stood in front of the bar grate to my right first. On the other side of the bars, floated a dark black mist. A chilly, cool and ominous air drifted out from the darkness. I timidly tried to look at the other side of the grate.

"… Who's there?" A voice called out from inside the darkness, my heart jumped in shock.

"Eek!"

"Who's… there?" I heard the hoarse voice of an old man. He sounded like he was being overly cautious of something awful.

"T-T-There… W-w-w-where do you mean… ?" My shaking voice bounced off the walls.

From the back of the cell a shadowed silhouette appeared. They remained seated in a chair with their head hanging down as if they were asleep.

"U-Umm… are you okay?" Even so, the person showed no sign of hearing me. I tilted my head to the side.

"… It's no use anymore."

The voice did not come from the cell in front of me as I had expected, but instead, the cell next to it.

"He hasn't been responding since yesterday… don't you know it's useless?"

Useless?

What's useless?

I once again looked at the cell in front of me. My eyes finally adjusted to the darkness, the face looking downward, blanketed in darkness, slowly became more clear.

The face had lost its vitality. His surprisingly long, dark red tongue lolled out of his mouth sloppily. I knew at first glance. He wasn't sleeping. He was dead.

"EEEK!!" I screamed as I stepped back and subsequently ended up landing on the floor after misjudging my footing.

It seemed so real, the possibility of the corpse before me being fake hadn't come to mind at all. This situation had become more scary than anything I had ever experienced in my recollection. Shivers ran through my body so much I felt almost like it hurt.

"Is he… dead?"

He's dead - the cold air passed through my lips and I felt unable to breathe. I quickly tried to gulp down a lungful of air with a heavy sob.

It was at that point when I heard the old man's voice sounding surprised.

"Why is it you're so panicked? You're… a comrade of those people, right…?"

I flicked through 'Otonashi Ryouko's Memory Notebook' with trembling hands - I almost immediately recalled the memory of the reserve students.

"O-Of course not! Please don't lump me together with those people wearing the strange masks!"

"So… You're not wearing a mask?"

What a strange question.

"C-Can't you… tell just by looking… ?" I stood up, stumbling unsteadily like a newborn deer. I walked clumsily in front of the adjacent cell where I heard the man's voice. I could see the figure of a man hunched over on a chair.

"I can't see."

"… Eh?"

The old man raised his head. The area where his eyes should have been on his wrinkled face - I saw two dark indents instead. It wasn't covered by shadows. There was fine black stitching, like it had been done by a sewing machine, blood oozed from the stitches and dried within the yarn. It had all come together into a pitch black mass preventing the man from opening his eyelids.

"… Erk!" I felt a severe bout of nausea as my stomach threatened to empty itself, I covered my mouth with my hands quickly.

"You seem surprised seeing this… you really aren't with them…" The old man's voice suddenly changed to a pleading tone, "… P-Please, can't you help me? Help me escape from this place! I couldn't thank you enough. S-So… I'm begging you!"

Because of the skin around the desperately begging man's eyes, it was almost impossible to discern his expression.

"W-what… happened?" I asked a simple question with a sob.

"T-They… locked us in separate cells… they wouldn't kill whoever they broke the jaw of… that's what they said…"

"They wouldn't kill… whoever they broke the jaw of…?"

"W-we cheered each other on at first… but the cheering was too much to bear… w-we were scared… if only we thought of betraying them earlier… there wasn't a choice… S-so…. so…" The old man's voice somehow went even lower. "So… they broke my jaw." He faced the other set of iron bars.

The dead body from the other cell wandered through the back of my mind. I wondered briefly why I had not forgotten about it yet.

"Hey, why don't we make a deal…?"

"Eh?"

The old man's voice sounded like he was begging once more, he suddenly started to talk again.

"If it's about what I know, then we should talk… you came here to hear about it, right? In exchange, you can help me escape from here… how does that sound?"

"… O-Okay." I answered somewhat automatically and instantly regretted doing so.

It really is better to be the one who isn't involved.

Even after saying I'd help him escape, I wasn't sure how to do it. More and more regret began to pile up but even so -

The man with the ruined eyes' story had already begun a long time ago.

"The people from the preparatory school had tried to find out from me… about a person's location. They called him… Kamukura Izuru…"

For the time being, I decided it would be for the best to listen to the old man's story. Either way, it didn't seem like I had any real choice, I'd have time to think about it after the story.

"I do not know where they found out, but they knew for a fact that we were hiding Kamukura. If they found out where he is… they'd be a heartbeat away from true power."

True power - I felt my jaw tightly shut at such a cruel sound.

"They're goal is to… crush this school. Using the existence of Kamukura Izuru… they'll overthrow Hope's Peak Academy from it's very foundations."

"D-Did you say crush!" I suddenly cried out, "T-That's… too much…"

If Hope's Peak Academy is crushed, I won't be able to see Matsuda-kun anymore.

"So… you have to do something and find a way to stop the preparatory school…"

"B-But what can I do…?"

"If this keeps up, we'll be handing Kamukura to the preparatory school on a silver platter… and there's no mistaking it'll be the end of Hope's Peak Academy."

"E-Even if you say that…"

"The old school building… Kamukura Izuru's there."

"P-Please wait…" I ended the conversation prematurely with an interruption. Quickly, I wrote in 'Otonashi Ryouko's Memory Notebook'.

Old School Building.

But then…

Huh?

I suddenly felt an attack of dizziness, I struggled to stay upright.

What's happening?

"Until just a short time ago, we used have a large amount of guards there. Officially speaking, before the demolition we can no longer do that due to the danger… But that's not the real reason. In truth, it's because that's where we're hiding Kamukura Izuru."

As I listened to his story distractedly, it happened again. I felt a dizziness beyond anything I could adequately convey. My vision was becoming a blur, as I stumbled I laid my hand on the bars in front of me to steady myself.

"Up until now, everything I've said…"

I knew the old man speaking was right in front of me, and yet it felt like he was in the far distance.

"Is the whole story as far as I know… could you free me now?"

His voice sounded almost like it was being muffled. My heart pounded so hard I could hear it ring loudly in the back of my ears.

"Oy, what's the matter? Hurry up… The area around my eyes has been unbearably hot for a while now… I want to go to a doctor… Oy, did you hear me?"

I didn't.

The beating in my ears was only growing louder, it completely drowned out all other sound, I couldn't hear anything anymore.

I shouldn't be able to hear anything anymore, and yet I could hear a single, eerie laugh.

"… Upupu."

At the same time, I felt a presence behind me.

A disgusting presence, it was like having uncomfortably warm air being blown onto the back of my neck.

"… Upupupupu."

Sensing it, my body begun to shake and tremble. I couldn't say anything, like I was paralyzed. The laugh grew louder and higher - it was almost like it was mocking me.

"Upupupupupupupupupupupu."

"W-What's so funny… !" Even the older man's shouts sounded like they taunted me, the voice became more intense.

"Upupupu. Upupupu. Upupupu. Upupupu. Upupupu. Upupupu. Upupupu."

"W-Why are you laughing! What's so funny?!" The old man shouted, his voice filled with uneasiness. He sounded angry and especially hoarse as he failed to grasp what was happening, "S-Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!"

The laughing came to a halt.

"… Upupu, what a lovely face you're making." The voice was directed to the old man, "But I said, 'You won't ever escape'… Your face will only become more despair-induced, you know?"

"… Wh… wha-w-wh-!"

"Upupupu!"

The old man's face was filled with emotion, for a moment it flashed white. His reaction seemed impossibly odd, the laughing grew louder again.

"Upupupupupu. Upupupupupu. Upupupupupu. Upupupupupu. Upupupupupu. Upupupupupu. Upupupupupu. Upupupupupu. Upupupupupu." The laugh bounced off the concrete around the room, each echo overlaying another.

Like a body with no soul, I stood still, dizzily swaying. The life was deprived from my entire body, making even small movements impossible. I couldn't even ignore the voices, only try to determine which was which. My consciousness reached it's limit, light, sound and colour had all disappeared at once. The scene before me twisted at skewed, like paint dripping onto water. The old man on the other side of the iron bars also became blurred at the border of my vision.

What?

As I watched the distorting world in front of me, I murmured to myself.

What is this?

Soon the world would melt into the puddle of colours, each colour hardened into different shades. The colours then started to intermingle once again, the world changed to another world. Like a scene with a flowing river, I swayed with the current, and everything in front of me passed me by.

Behind me was a giant, open door.

An avalanche of Monobear Heads poured out of it.

Screams echoed from the direction of the cell.

A puddle of bright red water appeared at my feet.

I ran from it in my trance.

Then, darkness.

The moment I opened my eyes, I found myself in a bright, white room.

It felt like I had reborn.

I, the new, reborn Ryouko Otonashi, woke up with a renewed sense of vigor as I stretched my body out, getting out of bed.

Turning my gaze to the window, the sun's light filled the white room with its brilliant light from between the curtains, signifying the morning's rays.

It appears that I fell asleep at some point. Being forgetful, I couldn't even remember the time I fell asleep-

"Ah."

At that moment, I felt light rush in from the back of my eyes. An image conceived itself within my head.

Underground facility.

Preparatory Department.

Monokuma.

A sudden flashback. Definitely an unfamiliar experience.

Could this be, my memory?

I immediately ran through my itching conscious.

It felt like I could remember something but at the same time I couldn't remember it. It came off like a natural sensation, yet at the same time I was embraced with bewilderment.

What is this? What happened to me?

Frightened with puzzlement and unsettlement, I shakily looked around the room. Doing so, I found my backpack sitting by my pillow. I hurriedly rummaged through it, and as I thought, there it was. The Ryouko Otonashi Notebook.

First things first, I need to remember where I am.

I paged through the notebook to see if I could recall anything about the room.

Um, this is the Neurology Laboratory.

"Ha, thank goodness."

Upon remembering that, I let out a sigh of relief.

Wait, but where's Matsuda-kun?

Right away I looked around the room I once more, but I couldn't catch sight of his appearance anywhere.

"Matsuda-kun…"

As I looked towards my notebook, I remembered something important.

Speaking of him, I haven't received treatment from him for a while.

Now I know why my head's been getting all funky lately. If that's so, I need to get treatment from Matsuda-kun as soon as possible!

The moment I was enveloped by that impatience, something interrupted.

rustle rustle

I heard a strange sound.

It sounded like it was coming from under the bed I was sitting on. I ran through my itchy conscience once again. Someone's voice repeated itself in my head.

Um, why are you under my bed?

Mental concentration for facing irritation.

Once I remembered that conversation, this time I energetically peeked under the bed.

"Matsuda-kun?"

Then, our eyes met.

I met eyes with the individual lurking under the bed.

But returning my gaze was an unfamiliar girl.

"Uh, who are you?"

Without thinking, I brought out that question. The girl, now on her back, shot back with a curt response.

"Do you think you could move from there? You're in my way."

"Uh…sure…"

Puzzled, I stepped away as the girl immediately crawled out from under the bed. She got up with a short grunt, and began brushing the dust off her body. Inadvertently my eyes stopped at her hands. The black leather gloves that neatly wrapped around her skin were quite impressive. But, possibly finding my stare uncomfortable, she quickly moved her hands behind her, as if to hide them.

"…Looks like the rumors were true."

"Huh?"

Without any preface whatsoever, she suddenly began speaking to me.

"W-What do you mean by rumors…?"

"Memory impairment right? I heard you're in treatment?"

Hearing that, once again my brain was assaulted by itchiness. Without thinking I sat down onto my bed. The girl appeared to give me a dubious look.

Trying to ignore the itchiness in my head, I asked her.

"A-Are you…someone I know?"

"Kyouko Kirigiri of Class 78."

The response was a name I've never heard of. Right away I opened my notebook and searched for any kind of mention but, I couldn't find anything.

So, she isn't someone I know?

"The details of your memory impairment were kept low-key in order to prevent your own confusion, that was your intention wasn't it? Or possibly Yasuke Matsuda's intention as well."

In face of her taking control of this interrogation, I was lost in bewilderment.

"Huh? W-What are you talking about?"

"I see. So you don't remember that either."

"Wait, you know Matsuda-kun?"

Upon those words she became quiet. She diverted her eyes as well, only making her look more suspicious. Without thinking I approached her.

"Hey, you know him right? If you know him, then please tell me! Where's Matsuda-kun?"

I desperately asked her. After all, he's all that's important to me. I want to know, and I have to know, as long as it's Matsuda-kun.

"Unfortunately, I don't know either."

"…Eh?"

Matsuda-kun grew further away from my reach.

Failing to hide my disappointment, my face fell into dismay. The girl absentmindedly gazed towards the window while murmuring.

"I'm searching for Yasuke Matsuda as well. There's something I need to confirm with him."

"…Something you need to confirm with Matsuda-kun?"

The moment I responded, she returned her gaze towards me. She examined me as if looking for something.

"I might as well confirm something with you as well."

"…Eh?"

"Earlier, you peeked under the bed while calling Yasuke Matsuda's name, right? Was that because you knew that was something he'd normally do?

"Huh? W-What…?"

The sudden interrogation flustered me, and the girl continued to corner me.

"You'd be better off answering honestly. Lying will only make this conversation more difficult."

"It's not like I need to lie abo-"

"Then you can answer honestly right?"

I timidly gave in to her pushing words.

"Yeah, I knew. Matsuda-kun said that when he gets annoyed, he has a habit of undergoing mental concentration under a bed and falling asleep. But, what does that have to do with anything?"

"Hmm, mental concentration eh?"

An eerie smile crept up Kirigiri-san's face. It seemed like she was making fun of Matsuda-kun, so without thinking I was about to-

"Well, it must have been a lie though."

"…Huh?"

"Yasuke Matsuda must have had a precise goal in mind crawling under that bed, just like how I was earlier…"

While I was still talking to her, Kirigiri-san crouched down to the bed and slowly stepped towards me. She finally stopped right in front of me and spoke while looking downwards.

"Could you move?"

"Huh? Oh, okay."

Confused, I got off the bed, and the girl put her hands under the dormant bedsheets and threw them up in one motion.

The bedsheets gently floated in the air.

"…You can see it right?

Kirigiri-san pointed under the bed.

I walked over to her side and squat down, peeking under the bed.

The one portion of the floor under the bed seemed to be sticking out unnaturally. There seemed to be a 50x50 space that lead into darkness.

"A hidden room, not just a simple one either. It's about the size of a storehouse."

"…Storehouse?"

"Probably to store a corpse."

"…Huh?"

While I was completely taken aback, Kirigiri-san continued to speak in an indifferent manner.

"There is a corpse hidden under here. Actually, 2 corpses. They appear to be the 2 missing members of the committee board."

"W-What are you saying?"

As blood rushed to my face, I unwittingly shouted out. Without looking towards me, she continued to speak with a cool face.

"It was a joke."

"J-Joke…?"

"Corpses typically begin rotting within 5 degrees Celsius. If there was a corpse here, it would have already been thoroughly decayed. Hey, do you know what bodies actually go through when decaying? Sulfur-carrying proteins throughout your body begin decomposing, releasing hydrogen sulfide creating a decaying odor strong enough that it can't be removed with just washing. And it doesn't just smell bad. The decaying gas increases pressure throughout the body, changing the muscles completely…eyeballs would pop out from swelling like ping pong balls, the tongue and lips would enlarge, and even the ends of the arms and legs would bulge out. The skin would then turn black and become nearly unrecognizable from its living counterpart… There's no way something like that would be around here. "

Just hearing that caused something sour to rise up, and instinctively I covered my mouth.

"I-I see, it was just a joke…"

"Although I was completely joking."

As if to further pursue me, she once again returned that stern gaze towards me.

"In here is a jersey as black as the interior, along with a pair of shoes of the same color. Most likely there were planned to be washed, but there are still some traces of blood remaining. A flatcar easily capable of transporting a body is located here as well."

"S-So…what are you trying to say?"

"What I'm saying is that Yasuke Matsuda was involved with the murder of the two missing committee board members."

At that moment, a shiver strong enough to make my body jump assaulted me. My teeth shaking, I desperately shot back.

"W-What are you saying? T-There's no way Matsuda-kun would murder someone!"

"No one said anything about him killing anyone. All I'm saying is he was involved with the murder."

Her thin, colored pupils appeared to shine from the sunlight momentarily.

"Although, what about the murder of the student council president? I doubt he was just simply "involved" with that…"

"…Huh?"

"Last night, Super High School Level Student Council President Soushun Murasame's corpse was found, which was believed to be suicide. But without a doubt, that was definitely a murder."

I wasn't able to see the end of this conversation, but even so, I instinctively had a bad feeling about it. The rate of the thumps in my chest raised to alarming heights. My breathing became ragged and sweat began pouring all over my body, and the blood vessels in my forehead began to violently pulse.

"Most likely…Yasuke, Matsuda, killed, Soushun, Murasame."

I could hear the sounds of the pillars supporting my stability crashing as they fell. An inconceivable mass of uneasiness developed inside me. The strings of thought telling me to argue back jumbled together into a mess, stopping me from forming them into words.

Kirigiri-san continued to stare at me with those eyes, so calm and collected, almost to the point where it pissed me off. Those eyes had no emotion, they were purely observing me.

Nothing makes sense anymore.

My messed up head, my tangled up thoughts, the overwhelming uneasiness, and those cold piercing eyes attacking me all at once as I sunk down a bottomless swamp.

While sinking, I desperately struggled and screamed out.

This has nothing to do with me!

I've had enough. I'll forget about this. If I just forget about it, everything will return to like it was before. This isn't an attempt to escape. Rather, it's a battle. A battle to fight off anyone that isn't Matsuda-kun out of my world.

Nothing to do with me. Nothing to do with me. Nothing to do with me. Nothing to do with me.

Before long, in harmony with the explosive beating in my chest, my voice became a scream.

Nothing to do with me! Nothing to do with me! Nothing to do with me! Nothing to do with me! Nothing to do with me! Nothing to do with me!

As I continued to frantically shout out, the boiling heat from the bottom of my stomach bubbled up like magma.

"THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!"

And it really exploded.

At the same time as my exclamation, the door behind Kirigiri-san shattered.

Small shards of glass and wood fluttered through the air, and the door as if made out of paper fell to the floor. The sound of destruction then finally reverberated around the laboratory like a storm.

I couldn't believe it. But I did that! Me!

While looking at the spectacle past Kirigiri-san's turned head,

T-This is my…true power?

I, Ryouko Otonashi, felt this fearsome ability awaken inside me.

When Kyouko Kirigiri stepped into the Neurology Laboratory, that girl was already lying down on the bed. She heard rumors about that girl. Supposedly she suffered from memory impairment and had been undergoing treatment in this laboratory, seems they were true.

But enough of that. More importantly, Matsuda-san didn't seem to be here.

Well, not like I was expecting him to be.

Having already anticipated that, she changed gears and began investigating the room. Due to Matsuda's absence, she was free to do as she pleased.

With that, she faced the girl lying on the bed.

I should probably be careful not to wake her up.

She wanted to avoid any unnecessary annoyances.

She then began to cautiously examine around the room.

After getting a good look around the room, she then proceeded to walk next to the bed.

As I thought, something's suspicious.

That impression was not aimed towards the girl lying on the bed, rather, it was towards the bed itself. If she was curious, the natural thing to do would be to investigate the bed. As if it a matter of fact, she began searching around the bed. Then, looking at the floor hidden under the bedsheets, she found a storehouse.

Kyouko, detecting the black jersey and shoes along with the simple pushcar casually tossed in there, soon developed a conclusion.

Yasuke Matsuda was involved with the murders of the committee board members. The only ones who recognized this were Kyouko and her client, the president of the school grounds. Furthermore, with even the corpses disappearing and hardly any decisive evidence for this case, she had all the more reason to continue to repeat her straight-forward investigation.

And she found a clue in an unexpected location for that very case. She didn't think Yasuke Matsuda would have been involved in this, but if that was the case, he might know where the remaining two committee board members have gone off to.

Ignoring Kyouko's warnings, the 4 committee board members who hid their whereabouts have now all become missing. But, it seems that finally those whereabouts can be revealed.

Whether or not it would be too late or not was a different story, but that wasn't important. Whether or not they help her or become sacrifices didn't matter. Her role was to expose the hidden truth as a detective, and those were her true feelings

But, who would have thought that those two cases were connected.

The reason she came here wasnt even related to the committee board in the first place.

She was here to investigate the case on the corpse of Soushun Murasame found in the Teaching Staff Facility.

According to the school doctor, it seems that the last person to meet with Murasame was Yasuke Matsuda. And not only that, after that meeting him he somehow disappeared to somewhere, hiding his whereabouts. As Kyouko

thought, if Murasame's death was due to murder, then Yasuke Matsuda was definitely suspicious. If that's the case, then why did he murder Soushun Murasame? In order to find that motive, Kyouko came to his main headquarters, this laboratory.

But, seeing that Yasuke Matsuda wasn't just involved with Murasame's case, but the committee board's as well, saying that he was the center of these 2 cases wouldn't be too far off the mark. To be involved with two cases at the same time like this, there was no way it couldn't be a coincidence.

If that's so, then what is his goal?

What does he know?

What is he hiding?

While she was going through her thoughts under the bed, unexpectedly a sound could be heard from above the bed.

It looked like the girl had woke up.

If so, it might be a good idea to ask her a few things. Chances are, it would be pretty unlikely for someone undergoing Yasuke Matsuda's medical treatment to just be a bystander. It might end up forcing her to realize the painful reality, but for the sake of revealing the hidden truth, there was no other choice. Again, those were her true feelings.

There wasn't much time left either, Kyouko was struck with impatience close to frustration. If she didn't hurry, it may become too late to find the clues she needed.

Yasuke Matsuda may never come back.

That was her intuition, but it wasn't just simply intuition. It was the intuition of the Kirigiri family's detectives. That intuition drew her forward. It drove her to find Matsuda's whereabouts as soon as possible. It wasn't like she was worried for his sake. It was only that she had to fulfill her duty as a detective to complete her accepted request. It was to ascertain the whereabouts of Izuru Kamukura.

Why? Because she was a detective.

So then, in order to fulfill her duty as a detective, she began her interrogation towards the girl.

"I might as well confirm something with you as well."

With that starting statement, she then proceeded to question the girl on sensitive matters in order to corner her.

Then, as she observed her response, she developed a conclusion.

This girl doesn't know anything.

The girl was falling into mass confusion, and her state showed that it wasn't an act. And from what I could see of her forgetfulness, there was no sign that she could have been an accomplice.

In other words, any further conversation with her wouldn't reveal any more results.

Rather than becoming discouraged, Kyouko thought of what would be the best course of action. But, before handling that, there was something else to deal with.

"THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!"

The sudden shriek that seemed to pierce her eardrums.

Then at the same time, the sound of something breaking roared behind her.

Instinctively turning around, the door's glass fragments scattered through the air.

Then, in the center of all that, a man's appearance revealed itself.

That man looked towards Kyouko and a hideous sinister smile crept up to his face, resembling a death god looking to cast an ill omen

While watching my screams shatter the door of the laboratory, I was awakened to my surprising ability.

The tale of the little girl being cornered, suddenly awakening to her power and seeking revenge. I felt like I saw something like that in a movie. But never mind that, more importantly I have to do something to stop my power from going berserk!

I understand. There is only method to stop this rampage.

And that's Matsuda-kun!

Other than Matsuda-kun examining my messed up head, there is no other secret technique to stop this overflow of power. Anyway, I have to hurry! If I don't do something about this soon, something horrible will happen!

That's why in order to meet Matsuda-kun,

I'm going to have to use this uncontrollable power just one more time!

Determined, I turned my gaze towards the wreckage and glared at the back of Kirigiri-san's head. I then focused all my concentration towards her head and locked on, letting out all of my power with a scream.

"BUUUUUURRRRRRST!!"

Doing so, the girl's head didn't burst into pieces like a watermelon at all.

Huh?

As I looked at Kirigiri-san's perfectly unchanged normal head, I tilted my head as I noticed someone's shadow standing in the back.

"So, you really were over here…"

It was a low, threatening voice.

The man with the jet-black uniform noisily stepped onto the wreckage of the overturned door while his just as jet-black hair swayed back and forth. His slim frame gave off a feeling of toughness, like a well-strung wire, and he was quite tall as well.

"…Too good for knocking?"

Kirigiri-san warily chose her words, attracting his attention.

"…Mind your own business."

While snapping back with his sharp words, he shifted his gaze alternatingly between Kirigiri-san and I with his thin reptile-like eyes.

The moment I saw his eyes, that itchiness began to spring back into my head again.

Right away I dropped my gaze to Ryouko Otonashi's Notebook, and then I remembered.

That's right, the pitch-black man's name was, Isshiki Madarai.

"Wait…but, why?"

After all, he's gotten beaten up so many times right in front of me.

First, when he got crushed under a bookcase.

Second, when he was assaulted by the black shadow known as Super High School Level Despair.

Third, when he was confronted by Mukuro Ikusaba right in this Neurology Laboratory.

Even with all of that, just why?

"Are you surprised why I'm unwounded?"

Successfully reading my thoughts, Madarai stretched out his arms to an unsettling length and smiled. The smile resembled a crescent moon, making it almost like a mask.

"I've said it before haven't I? I'm immortal."

As if complying with his words, the glass at his feet chimed.

I just wanted to see Matsuda-kun, but all I get are these people speaking nonsense surrounding me.

"Trying to get anything out of that girl is futile…"

"…Who're you?"

Madarai faced Kirigiri-san with a cold stare that would have frozen a normal person. But Kirigiri-san looked right back at him and shook it off like it was nothing, and continued speaking indifferently.

"You were originally investigating the disappearance of the student council, correct?"

Madarai raised his eyebrows, surprised.

"…You know who I am?"

"I just overheard a few things."

Kirigiri-san raised her chin, and after a few moments continued to speak.

"But I know that you are not immortal at least. After all, your ability isn't all-powerful, it definitely has its limits. Isn't that right, Hope's Peak Academy Student Council Member Super High School Level Bodyguard-san?"

"That's something only the student council would know…where the hell did you overhear something like that?"

grind grind

There was a peculiar sound coming from the back of Madarai's mouth.

"If your ears are that good, then you should probably know something about this then. C'mon, tell me. Who's the guy behind Hope's Peak Academy's History's Largest Worst Incident? Where's the bastard that killed the student council?"

"Haven't you been listening? Asking is pointless. Of course, along with that girl over there, I don't know anything about that."

"No, that's a lie."

"What makes you think that?

"My intuition. Do I need a reason other than that?"

After saying that, Madarai's intimidating presence grew stronger.

The glass under his feet continued to shatter from his force as he stepped forward, and naturally, I began to step back.

"Hey."

While being cautious of Madarai, Kirigiri-san faced me and spoke.

"Judging from the way he's been talking, you've driven him off multiple times haven't you?"

"Y-You shouldn't expect too much from me."

I weakly turned my head towards her.

"I don't really remember, but every incident was just a coincidence, and it looks like he's immortal too…"

While speaking, I carefully glanced towards Madarai, and in return he glared at me with his sharp eyes. Panicking, I quickly averted my gaze while, "I-It's impossible! At least we can take advantage of our numbers, like one of us becoming the decoy and the other running away…that's the only way!"

I attempted to casually suggest her to become a decoy, I wasn't sure if she successfully took in my meaning.

"So, what are you gonna do? Behave and fess up, or should I beat you 'til you talk? Do you think you could hurry up and make your mind?"

Madarai flipped his greasy, long hair while asking.

"L-Like I said, I really don't know anything…"

"We don't know anything."

In contrast to my stuttering words, Kirigiri-san confidently shot back. She had almost nothing to do with the situation, but her resolve didn't once seem to waver. Honestly, it was almost like she was being stubborn for the sake of being stubborn. Well, she must have had her reasons, but I would like it if I didn't have to get dragged into this.

"…Seems like you won't budge."

As his voice grew more threatening as he mumbled, he grew a silent smile.

"Looks like I have no choice then. I'll use my true power. I'll tell you right now, this is unlike anything you've seen so far. It's a pain but I'll deal with you in one go."

He then started to sway his slender body left and right.

Right at the next moment, a mysterious sensation invaded my body.

As if I was dizzy, my vision became to blur. Madarai's appearance in front of me seemed to split into two.

But, the only thing splitting into two was Madarai, the rest of the world remaining like always.

"…W-What?"

No matter how many times I blinked, the scene in front of me didn't change.

My eyes weren't fooling me, there really were two Madarais in front of me.

"I'll introduce myself once more."

"I"ll introduce myself once more."

In harmony, they both spoke at the same time.

"My name is Yoshiki Madarai."

"My name is Goshiki Madarai."

[Okay this is kind of like a play on words, with Isshiki Madarai's name. the 一(i) in 一式斑井(Isshiki Madarai)'s name uses the character for the number 1, while Yoshiki and Goshiki use the characters for 4 and 5, 四(Yo) and 五(Go), respectively. By the way, Yoshiki's name might be Yonshiki due to certain japanese language tendencies, but I'm not too sure.]

The slim, long bodies of the left Madarai and the right Madarai seemed to entangle around each other.

The scene was creepy enough to send shivers up my spine.

"You really look just like one…what I heard was true it seems."

Kirigiri-san's cautious words sounded out once again.

"Like I said, just where the hell did you hear about those things."

"Like I said, just where the hell did you hear about those things."(Yo) (Go)

Madarai's creepy voices once again came out in harmony.

"The Madarai brothers…the octuplets from Isshiki Madarai to Yasshiki Madarai (Ya in this case being the character for 8), those who know about them refer to them as Super High School Level Multiple Birth Siblings…due to efficiently utilizing their mutual understanding, their teamwork has led them be known as the Super High School Level Bodyguard, the Madarai Brothers' greatest talent…at least that's what I heard."

"O-Octuplets?"

Octuplets including Isshiki Madarai to Yasshiki Madarai.

Super High School Level Multiple Birth Siblings.

That is the Madarai Brother's greatest talent.

"T-That's cheating, isn't it?"

I desperately shouted out.

"That's not being immortal at all! It doesn't even make any sense!"

Then, the 2 Madarai's mouths creaked open.

"Well, that's just how it is."

"Well, that's just how it is."

"Well, that's just how it is."

Wait, was there one extra?

And at that moment I heard footsteps from behind me.

Both Kirigiri-san and I turned around at the same time, and as if blocking the doorway to the back of the laboratory, stood another Madarai.

"…I'm Rokushiki Madarai." [This time it's the character for 6. Like earlier, I don't know if it's really pronounced Roku.]

That was the arrival of the 3rd one.

"With this, you guys have lost by numbers as well." and in order, "That's why you shouldn't let your guard down." following up right on beat, "We're going to beat reality into you 'til you fess up." as all 3 voices rang out.

Right to left, and then from behind.

They circled around me forming a semicircle, perplexing me.

"H-Hey…what should we do?"

I faced Kirigiri-san with my clingy voice.

"This isn't the time to be"

"thinking about that!"

"thinking about that!"

The two Madarais in front of us kicked at the wreckage towards us, turning the wreckage into lethal projectiles.

"…Tsk!"

Kirigiri-san rammed into me, using that force to push me to the opposite side. The flying bits of the door's wreckage barely missed us at at a hair's breadth.

"…There!"

Due to being pushed I fell on my butt, but because it was no time to falter I quickly stood up. But right at that moment the neck cuff of my shirt was pulled from behind.

"Gah!"

Without time to even think about it hurting or to be let go, I was thrown. Like a rampaging child throwing his doll in a tantru, my body flew through the air with my head and body hitting a wall, finally coming to a stop.

"…Kh!"

My eyes blacked out from the shockwave.

All I knew was that I was in the hallway. It was difficult to comprehend how easily I was thrown from the laboratory, but in any case, I just had to deal with my body aching all over. With my butt, my neck, and my back all being beat up more than necessary, I tried to pull through my numbness along with dealing with the pain coming from seemingly losing all feeling from those body parts.

Then out of nowhere, Madarai stood in front of me.

Not too far from the ceiling, his eyes looked down on me from a sharp angle, which more than resembled a reptile now. In other words, it was terrifying.

"You've gotten away time after time again."

Even though I heard his words, strangely his mouth didn't move.

"But with two people, this should be more than enough."

Then from behind the Madarai standing in front of me, stepped out a different Madarai.

Looks like it was that Madarai who was talking.

The 2 Madarais standing in my blurred vision, this was truly a scene of despair. Not only that, with me thrown into the hallway, I couldn't rely on Kirigiri-san any longer.

"I'll ask you one more time."

"I'll ask you one more time."

They once again spoke out in harmony.

"In what way are you related to this case?" following up, "Who should I be taking out my revenge on?" in rapid succession, "Where is that bastard?" as if winding together, "Or maybe it's really you?" they, "Hurry up and talk." pursued me.

But, right at that moment.

I suddenly felt a breeze over my head.

Looking up, I saw that the window was open.

Ah.

The moment I saw that, an inspiration flew into my mind.

"Looks like you won't talk unless I force it out of you."

"Looks like you won't talk unless I force it out of you."

At the same time, the Madarais' hands reached out towards me.

There was no time to hesitate.

I dodged through the arms as I stood up, and at that rate I jumped with all my might onto the edge of the window. With that motion, I aimed towards the rear garden, and that's when I realized.

This was the third floor.

"Wha-?"

"Wha-?"

The expressions of the Madarais left behind both changed to surprise simultaneously. Throwing myself out of the hallways' third floor window was definitely outside of their expectations, and that goes the same for myself. Actually, the surprise on my face was most likely even greater than theirs. Then, while still surprised, my body caught by gravity continued to fall straight down towards the garden.

"Aaaaaaahhh….."

What followed that fall was, a shock wave.

It wasn't a fatal shock wave however. It didn't even take my conscious. Miraculously, my body fell straight into some shrubbery, exceptionally cushioning my fall.

That was just 100% coincidence.

I didn't know about it, I didn't aim for it, and I didn't expect it either.

But for some reason, even though I couldn't understand it, I took that coincidence like it was a matter of course. Still, the shockwave was strong enough to numb most of my body, and my arms, legs, and face were all being stabbed by the prickly bits of the shrubbery. Even so, I calmly ordered my head to escape, and my arms and feet slowly regained their functions. I then proceeded to crawl out on all fours.

While crawling, I ran into 2 pairs of black shoes.

Continuing on all fours, I raised my head up to see two Madarais looking down on me.

"I'm Shichishiki Madarai." [7]

"I'm Yasshiki Madarai." [8]

They were different Madarais from the ones on the third floor. Looks like they were called out.

"Well, we certainly didn't expect you to come falling down."

"Well, we certainly didn't expect you to come falling down."

Without thinking, a gulping sound came from my throat.

But despite this nightmare-like situation, I didn't feel confused, scared, or uneasy. Instead, what I felt was, That intense itchiness in my brain.

And along with that itchiness came a premonition.

I won't die.

I won't die here.

How that premonition floated up was unknown even to myself, but it was definite that that was the premonition. I was almost completely sure about that.

"What's with that easy-going face."

"It's pissing me off."

The two Madarais looked like they were wrapping around each other as they advanced and examined my face. In those eyes were a thick concentration of murderous intent.

"Why don't you understand the situation you're in for once?"

"Why don't you understand the situation you're in for once?"

The Madarais then formed a fist together, and followed up raising them together.

But my gaze was looking past them, focused on the girl behind their shoulders.

It seems that, my premonition earlier conveniently matched the situation at the moment.

"You shouldn't pry into outsiders' affairs so much."

The Madarais turned around at the same time, and the girl who was supposed to be as far away to the point where she was the size of a thumb suddenly appeared behind their backs.

The itchiness in my brain. At that point, I remembered.

That girl's name was, Mukuro Ikusaba.

"I won't say anything but, you should probably lay off that girl."

Then with both hands, she firmly gripped the Madarais' arms.

"…Guh!"

"…Guh!"

As their expressions changed to anguish, their knees hit the floor.

"Give up, your hands won't last in this level of situation…"

Her grip on their hands were so strong that a sound could be heard. Just where could that slim girl be hiding all that power? But the ones that understood her strength first hand were the suffering Madarais themselves.

"Don't screw with me!"

"Don't screw with me!"

The kneeling Madarais screamed, almost at the same time.

Behind Ikusaba-san, who was behind the Madarais, came 2 different Madarais jumping out.

Several right and left legs shot out in symmetry in a flying kick towards Ikusaba-san. But without any signs of being fazed at all, she released the arms of the Madarais in front of her and dodged the flying kicks coming at her in one fluid motion. The two brothers who launched those flying kicks nimbly changed positions before landing.

The four Madarais had Ikusaba-san completely surrounded.

"What do we do about that girl over there?" "Leave that to Rokushiki." "Can you handle that by yourself?" "It's not like she's accustomed to combat." "First let's take care of this one." "Yeah, that would be simpler." While they discussed their strategy with their ridiculously similar voices, their firm watch over Ikusaba-san did not waver once.

But, Ikusaba-san showed no signs of being cornered. Instead, she was rapidly glancing at all their faces while seemingly murmuring her confirmations.

"If I defeat these four, and I just leave one for Kirigiri-san…got it, all according to plan."

All according to plan, hearing those words, the Madarais strongly reacted. In harmony, all four of their voices shouted out.

"What the hell are you talking about!"

But of course, Ikusaba-san responded with a cool face.

"Not much, nothing you guys would need to know…you guys don't even seem to be holding any important information in the first place. That's why I'm telling you now, you should probably give up."

"Shut up!" "Shut up!" "Shut up!" "Shut up!"

The four intimidating voices attacked Ikusaba-san all at once.

"You think we can give up now?" "We swore to them!" "We'll keep on going for the student council!" "We'll prove that to you!" "We swear to protect the student council's honor!" "We'll protect it to the death!" "We'll definitely take our revenge on you!" "We won't let anyone get in our way!"

From the right to the left,

From the front to the back,

Their frustrated interchanging words dispersed throughout the air. Even so, Ikusaba-san carefreely scratched her head, sighing.

"Um, I feel like I can relate to what you guys are going through but…wait, that's a lie. I actually can't relate to them at all…but I can understand them. But that girl is different. To her, she has no gain from understanding what you have to say. Stuff like your thoughts or your hope, they mean nothing to her. It means nothing to the one who set up this entire scenario, so trying to end all of this by pushing on her would be futile."

grind, grind, grind, grind

The sounds of their mutual grinding filled the garden.

"It looks like you don't know anything at all." "You know about Hope's Peak Academy's History's Worst Incident it seems." "That's convenient." "We'll listen to you to what you have to say." "But after we beat you up."

The four Madarais bent down and formed a stance.

"Ah geez, even after I warned you." Ikusaba-san seemed to grumble. "Even though I didn't want any more victims to get involved."

"Victim?" "Victim?" "Victim?" "Victim?"

Once again the Madarais all shouted together. Encircling her like a dog threatens to shepherd a herd, bared their teeth and roared.

"Do you know?" "Do you know about our brothers?" "Where did are brothers disappear to?" "What happened to Isshiki, Nishiki, and Mishiki?" [1, 2, and 3]

Then Ikusaba-san turned back and with her freezing glare she responded.

"Don't come near me…"

Those words triggered it.

A sound like something rupturing was heard as the four brothers kicked off the ground with all their might, as they headed towards Ikusaba-san from 4 directions all at once.

"Like I said…it's pointless…"

Just as Ikusaba-san was about to get hit by the blunt of those attacks, she dodged them completely with just one movement.

"No matter how many of you come at me at once, your base value never changes. That kind of pack mentality attack won't get through me."

While murmuring in that calm voice, she moved at a speed incomprehensible to the naked eye. The Madarais attacked with such coordination to the point where their breaths were at the same pace, while Ikusaba-san easily dodged them with brilliant deduction.

It was almost like she was from a different dimension.

"I won't let anyone oppose that girl…"

Even while dancing she murmured. Her breath didn't falter once.

"That's because this is for…despair…"

The Madarais continued to repeat their emaciated attacks while, Ikusaba-san on the other hand continued to move faster, rolling like a torrent. Eventually, that torrent mercilessly swallowed them up.

From there, it was pretty much a one-sided development.

It developed one-sidedly, and it ended one-sidedly.

When Ikusaba-san finally stopped, the four Madarais were laid around her feet.

That wasn't some halfway transition. What I witnessed was truly only that event.

"It's over…"

Letting out a small sigh, Ikusaba-san murmured while already looking away from the Madarais. Those eyes then faced towards me.

Astonished, I forget what I was doing and was just taken aback.

"Why are you…so strong…?"

"It's all I'm good for after all."

That girl who replied didn't have one thing you could call an expression laid out on her face. It was like she was wearing an emotionless mask, with only specks of blood splattered here and there.

"…Why did you save me?"

"Well, just because."

"Just because?"

Ikusaba-san nodded and dropped her gaze down to her feet. After a few moments of silence, she gently opened her mouth again.

"For example, it's like a video game RPG…"

Video game?

It's like that?

"Like a straightforward RPG or something…the people who live in that world, it looks like they have their own will, but it just looks like that…in the end they are just scripted to act in a way convenient for the game…it's the same with the protagonist, it's just that the protagonist doesn't even realize what he is…"

"What are you…trying to say?"

"Um, well, my fight with the Madarais wasn't a coincidence…actually it's the same with the Madarais coming to the Neurology Laboratory…and the same with removing the unnecessary Kirigiri-san from the scenario…everything was determined right from the beginning."

"W-What do you mean by determined?"

"The same goes for me. I'm just moving along as scripted with her scenario…moving accordingly to her will, only to prevent the scenario from taking the wrong path…"

"Her?"

"I'm talking about Junko Enoshima of course."

At that moment it felt like my blood froze.

As expected, everything returns to Junko Enoshima. Everything from getting me or Matsuda-kun or involved, it's all because of that horrible girl, wait what?"

At that point I suddenly realized it.

"Then, you're working with Junko Enoshima?"

As I glared at her blamingly, Ikusaba-san hesitantly responded, as if embarrassed.

"Well, working with her, it's more like she's…my…sister…"

"Huh?"

It was too sudden of a confession.

Mukuro Ikusaba and Junko Enoshima are sisters… Wait that's even worse than just working together isn't it?

"But, even though we're sisters and we're connected by blood…all of that doesn't mean anything to her. After all, all that girl looks for is despair, other people's despair, her own despair, that's all that exists for her…"

All of a sudden it looked like Ikusaba-san's eyes were gazing far away.

"That's why, whoever it may be, whatever situation it may be, whatever world it may be, it just all means nothing to her, unless she is dealing with despair. That's the world of the girl known as Super High School Level Despair, Junko Enoshima."

"W-What the…but that's ridiculous!"

"Yes, it's ridiculous. That's what Junko Enoshima is."

Hearing her response, I felt a new sensation of dread. This time it was creeping up from my feet bit by bit.

"Yes, she really is ridiculous…to the point of despair, she's the lowest, worst sister ever but…that's why I can't leave her alone. That's why I have to help her. After all, I'm the only one who can understand her."

Then, looking at the face Ikusaba-san showed me, I was suddenly taken aback. The ever so emotionless face was, ecstatic and smiling.

"I don't know if…she is attracting despair or despair is attracting her but…she has lived her whole life with despair by her side. She lived while immersed in despair. That's why she began looking for despair in others. She learned to enjoy pushing people into despair. But you know, that's normal. It's the same as someone being cursed by misfortune fall into hatred for those who aren't. But what's special about her was that, she learned to enjoy inflicting despair onto herself. That's how the link to despair began. As she chased down despair, she pushed it onto others on the way. Doing so, it caused her to desire falling into despair even more…and because of that chain to despair, the Super High School Level Despair was born."

While she spoke, it was like she fell into a fever, the expressions on her face turned into ecstasy. It was so completely absurd that it would have been hard for anybody to think of it as anything but a joke, but I understood that this was real. It might've been because the memories of Junko Enoshima inside me led to that conclusion.

"Hey, you don't get it right? I don't think anybody could. But you know, only I can understand it…"

Consumed by ecstasy, even Ikusaba-san's breaths began to become ragged.

"Only I am able of understanding her. That's why she needs me. She still hasn't realized that but, maybe she is only pretending not to realize. Ufu, that's because she's so shy. Ufufufu."

Seeing this intoxicated Ikusaba-san continue to talk like that, repelled me.I knew that she definitely didn't have normal feelings for Junko Enoshima, but that sort of thing shouldn't have anything to do with me.

"…That's right, it has nothing to do with me."

Without thinking, I started speaking.

"Eh….?"

"It's not like I know anything about you or Junko Enoshima…that sort of thing doesn't have anything to do with me…"

Realizing what I was saying, I quickly apologized.

"Ah…I'm sorry!"

At that moment, Ikusaba-san's face turned pale.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!"

Getting more and more into it, I began to bow my head as well.

"You don't need to apologize that much…"

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!"

Even so, I continued to apologize to the point where she almost felt bad, and then I realized how tired I was. Putting everything aside, I was tired. Tired from the confrontation of the Madarais, the conversation with Ikusaba-san about Junko Enoshima, and above all, I just wanted to see Matsuda-kun.

That's right, I want to see Matsuda-kun!

"Hey, it's okay if I leave now right?"

With eagerness strong enough to blow away my tiredness, I felt like I had to get out of this place and without waiting for her answer, "Anyway, thanks for helping me! I'll be leaving now!"

Leaving those words, just as I started running off,

"Oh, wait. I still haven't told you the whereabouts of Yasuke Matsuda."

Immediately breaking to a stop, I turned around and faced Ikusaba-san.

"If you don't know where he is…you probably won't be able to see him…"

"How do you know where Matsuda-kun is?" I immediately ran up closer to her. "More importantly, if you know then please tell me!"

But as I approached her, I was suddenly taken aback.

Ikusaba-san's face was radically different from earlier, a grim stern expression. It felt like she was a sniper in a battlefield aiming at her target.

"I don't like it when things go towards this direction after getting along so well, but this is part of the scenario so I have no choice…"

While murmuring with sadness as if she was about to cry, she shot her freezing glare towards me.

"In order for me to tell you Yasuke Matsuda's whereabouts, an exchange is required."

"E-Exchange?"

Ikusaba-san then pointed towards the Madarais laying on the floor, and spoke with a low voice.

"Those people laying over there still don't know about the last remaining member of the student council, the student council president, being murdered. I'm sure if they found out, they would fall into despair…despair strong enough to push them to even die for the sake of revenge."

"W-What are you saying?"

My voice filled with tension, even I understood what she was talking about.

"If you leave them be, I'm sure they would go and kill Yasuke Matsuda."

Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Soon, those words began to spin around in my head.

"Why does Matsuda-kun need to die…the student council president's murder has nothing to do with him!"

"That's not true, it does have something to do with him."

Ikusaba-san shaked her head.

"Because, Yasuke Matsuda murdered the student council president."

Murdered. Murdered. Murdered. Murdered. Murdered. Murdered. Murdered. Murdered.

"That's why we'll exchange."

While saying that, she took something out of her pocket and threw it towards my feet.

"Work your hardest for his sake. If you really love Yasuke Matsuda…then you'd work your hardest for him."

I dropped my eyes towards my feet. Sitting on the moist ground was a knife with Hope's Peak Academy's emblem engraved onto it. The moment I laid eyes on it, my heart began beating with an amount of blood strong enough to break a vessel.

"To seize hope for both him and yourself…you must work at your hardest."

I can't be expected to—

Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill.

"Y-You can't be serious right…?"

"No, I'm serious."

Without time for thinking she immediately responded.

"You will overcome Hope's Peak Academy here. With the sacrifices of the Madarais, you will obtain true hope…that is the scenario Junko Enoshima has assigned to you."

What is this…

The scenario Junko Enoshima assigned…

Why?

Why am I forced to do this?

The severe confusion gave me a fever, I was attacked with immense dizziness and ringing in my ears.

"Why!" "Why!" "Why!" "Why!" "Why!"

And then I realized I was gazing up at the sky.

Thick, grey clouds began covering the sky, making it like only this moist, gloomy garden was in the middle of the night, enveloped in silence.

While I stared at the sky absent-mindedly, I could feel the black, helpless emotions inside of me bubbling up. Like the toxic sludge from underground sewers, it dried up like dead grass.

This is…

I stopped and thought with my hazy head.

This is despair.

"To overcome this despair and…seize hope."

Who's voice was that?

Was it mine?

Ikusaba-san's?

Or was it…

But, it already had nothing to do with me.

Suddenly, I reached out my hand towards the silver knife. And then to slice away the dark fog of despair, I wielded the knife in a trance.

Doing so, I felt the texture of flesh.

Beyond the knife standing into the Madarai's bodies, I could feel the blade stabbing all the way through the skin and muscle.

The fresh blood squirting out. The cries of death.

Goosebumps spread across my skin and I instantly felt the pain of my stomach's insides knotting together.

Despite that, I stabbed.

Overcome despair, for the sake of seizing hope for Matsuda-kun and I.

I stabbed and stabbed and stabbed and stabbed and stabbed and stabbed and stabbed and stabbed and stabbed and stabbed and stabbed.

I could hear my screams coming from far away.

They were screams from my broken heart.

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHH "AAAAAAHHH!"

I then returned to myself.

From there, as if to shake off the delusions floating up into my head, I soon screamed once again.

"I-I-I can't do it!"

While my hand was ridged from reaching out towards the knife, my head ached from fear of the simulation that just flew by my mind.

I won't do it! I have no reason to do this!

"Ah, um…"

Then, i heard the puzzled voice of Ikusaba-san coming from above.

"You know that if you don't overcome despair here, you won't be able to seize hope….right?"

"I-I can't do that!" I screamed while sobbing. "Hope and despair…that's just what you or Junko Enoshima have been talking about right? It has nothing to do with me!"

My throat began to burn up from screaming so much, and my tears and snot mixed together as I crouched towards the ground.

"Uu..H-Help me…Help me Matsuda-kun…"

As if pleading, I continued to cry. Grasping my head, I continued to shamelessly cry.

"Help me…help me Matusda-kun…Matsuda-kun, Matsuda-kun, Matsuda-kun…"

Then, an even further puzzled voice could be heard from Ikusaba-san.

"Um…I don't really know what to do in these kinds of situations…but anyway, I'll tell you where Yasuke Matsuda is."

"….Huh?"

In surprised, I lifted my head up.

"….Huh?"

Ikusaba-san was in surprise as well. Probably because my face was so unsightly from crying.

"You'll…tell me?"

"Well…if things end at this rate, Junko-chan will get mad at me…"

Hearing that, I scrubbed my face with the sleeves of my uniform, and once again firmly stood up on my two feet. I then slapped my cheeks to focus, and faced Ikusaba-san with a question.

"Then…tell me. Where is Matsuda-kun?"

Ikusaba-san then responded with a light voice.

"Um, Yasuke Matsuda is at the Ex-School Building."

Once again, the intense itchiness attacked my head.

"Ex-School Building…"

It felt like I heard those words not too long ago somewhere. But it was no time to be dealing with that itchiness right now.

"Got it…so if I go to the Ex-School Building I'll meet Matsuda-kun right?"

"Yes, that place is supposed to be the planned climax."

I'm able to meet Matsuda-kun. With that thought in mind, a mysterious power seemed to come up from deep within me. My screaming and shouting and falling into despair from before seemed to all be a lie.

This is…

I felt myself brimming with energy.

This is hope!

"Thanks! I'll be taking off then!"

I then bowed my head towards Ikusaba-san. I had no reason to bow my head towards the sister of the horrible Junko Enoshima who was assisting her in that messed up plan but, this might be the power of hope as well!

"Alright, good luck then. I'll take care of cleaning up what's left here."

Ikusaba-san spoke while looking around at the Madarais laying at her feet.

"After I clean this up I'll go and help Kirigiri-san…then I'll remove Kirigiri-san from this scenario…then everything will go along just like the scenario…so leave the rest to me…"

I was tired of hearing her repeatedly talk about the scenario towards the very end. That's why with a short "Bye!", I immediately ran off.

But as soon as I dashed off, I suddenly noticed something.

While running, I turned around and saw Ikusaba-san absent-mindedly standing still. Lying around her where those four Madarais but, I felt like there was something missing there.

But I couldn't remember what.

But it wasn't the time to think about something like that, and I continued to run straight ahead.

That's right, I don't have the time to be turning around.

I was heading towards Hope Peak's Academy North District's Ex-School Building.

Even without looking at Ryouko Otonashi's Notebook, the path towards my destination somehow floated up into my head. It looks like I was pretty troubled. Troubled to the point where I couldn't handle it, but if it's to meet Matsuda-kun, then it'll all be okay. I'll be able to get rid of this uneasiness.

That's because if I meet Matsuda-kun, everything will turn back to normal. My head will become normal again, and then I'll be able to return to those peaceful days with Matsuda-kun.

Whatever there may be, whatever may happen, I'll return to those peaceful days of receiving treatment from Matsuda-kun.

That is my ideal happy ending.

What I was heading for wasn't the Ex-School Building, it was towards that happy ending.

Heading towards that happy ending, I ran as fast as I could.

Huh? Rain?

I noticed it while entering the central garden from the back garden of the Biology Laboratory. It seemed like rain began falling at some point. The rain wasn't too hard, but it was strong enough for sounds of it hitting the trees and grass to be heard.

But this level of rain won't be enough to stop me. As the cold rain engulfed my body, I aimed towards the lined up school buildings and dashed off from the East District's central garden.

Due to either the rain or because it was possibly during lecturing hours, there weren't many students around in the central garden. Either way, there were students running as if fleeing from the rain, and others who were calmly walking under umbrellas. As I ran ahead at full speed without any kind of protection from the elements, I must have gotten some odd looks towards my direction.

This kind of thing would normally have nothing to do with me, but for some reason this particular time I felt a bit annoyed.

I felt a violent irritation develop as those people standing from a safe place watched me as if examining some kind of swelling tumor.

Even so, I continued to tell myself that it had nothing to do with me as I ran straight through the central garden.

At that rate, I eventually exited the East District and ended up at the Central Plaza, and then-Once again I caught sight of groups of students. Most likely they were heading back to their dormitories in the South District. Different colored umbrellas in hand, they seemed to enjoy chatting with each other as they slowly walked down the pavement.

Glancing at them from the back of my eye, I dashed off from the pavement.

There probably isn't any clear-cut road leading to the North District's Ex-School Building, so unless I cut through the Central Plaza I won't be able to proceed.

The grass at my feet was wet, and there were puddles developing here and there as well.

Reaching the now half-vacant North District, my figure soon disappeared from other people's vision, seeing how there wouldn't even be many people in this area on a rainy day like this.

The grass at my feet became more and more bare as I proceeded, and the number of trees began to decrease as well. Eventually the land presented itself to be almost like a wasteland.

After progressing through the wasteland for a bit, an artificial structure came into view.

That's…I see

As I looked up at the building, I began to slow down my running pace.

Hope's Peak Academy Ex-School Building.

Just looking at its solemn appearance didn't give the impression that it was some abandoned building. But…

Not having done so for quite a while, I checked out my Ryouko Otonashi Notebook.

It seemed that this building had already fulfilled its role, at most half a year ago. If that was true, then it wouldn't be strange for this building to still seem like it was used not too long ago.

But the tall fences that surrounded the building seemed to shout that it was already finished. Plates were even stuck on the fences detailing "Hope's Peak Academy North District Planned Construction Land, DO NOT ENTER".

While straightening out my unsteady breath, I walked at a slow pace around the fence. To enter the Ex-School Building, it seemed that there was no other way than to climb over these but,

Then, once again I could feel that itchiness in my head.

Still not used to it, my face grimaced, and then suddenly a thought floated into my head.

Speaking of which, I remember hearing that there were security guards around this area.

Even though I didn't look at my Notebook, I remembered that. Surprised by those turn of events, I came to a halt without thinking, and then, another wave of surprise washed over me.

A number of security guards surrounded me.

"…Eh? Huh?"

In a panic, I frantically looked around me. Speechless and emotionless, almost like if they were lifeless mannequins. All they were doing was simply looking straight at me.

"U-Um…I'm not really anyone suspicious or anything….wait, what?"

Without listening to my excuses, the security guards split up and dispersed.Ignoring what should have been an obvious intruder, they continued their patrol and left.

"Eh? Huh? Um…"

Being left behind, I stood there shocked speechless, and then met eyes with the only remaining security guard.

He's young?

The face under the helmet was of a high schooler's, no matter how you looked at it. His mouth twisted into something like a smile, and he brought out a shining object.

It was a medal.

That medal had a bear mascot engraved upon it.

It was half white and half black, it was a peculiar bear mascot.

If I recall correctly that was,

"It was called…Monokuma…"

It happened again. Without even looking back at the Notebook, that thought floated up into my head by itself. It was almost like someone else's thought was pushed into my head, it was an eerie sensation.

Is this what remembering is?

But this wasn't the time to be analyzing myself—

Suddenly the right arm of the security guard unexpectedly extended outward.

It seemed like he was pointing to something with that right arm.

Following that direction with my eyes, I was led to a small opening one could crawl into between the fences.

But, why would a security guard tell me something like that?

The moment I returned my eyes towards the security guard, he was already walking away.

Not exactly sure why, I absent-mindedly gazed at his figure moving farther and farther away, as another thought suddenly floated into my brain again. It looked like I remembered yet another thing.

In the end, everyone is just conveniently moving along the Scenario.

Suddenly I felt some kind of heavy fear pressing on me from the back of my head.

But, it'll all be alright.

I desperately convinced myself.

Anyway, if it's to meet Matsuda-kun, then everything will be alright.

That's what I believed.

I believed in Matsuda-kun.

I believed in my feelings for Matsuda-kun.

I believed in the world of myself and Matsuda-kun.

By earnestly believing in him I blew away all my uneasiness, and then moved forward with renewed vigor.

I crawled under the small opening in the fence and reached the back side of the Ex-School Building.

As I walked around the building looking for an entrance, I came across a large entranceway in the front. Possibly due to the building's condition getting worse, the door was half-open, it was pretty obvious that it wasn't locked. I drew closer to it while keeping an eye out, and carefully slipped into the opening. What laid ahead of the door was a dim, dusty entrance hallway.

"…Matsuda-kuuuun"

While calling out his name, I continued to proceed down the entrance hall. Wet noises could be heard coming from my shoes absorbing the moisture at my feet.

"Matsuda-kuuuun. Where are yooooou?"

While raising my voice and peeking down the hallway, I felt like something was out of place.

Isn't it too dark?

Even more so than the entrance hall, the hallway ahead of me seemed to be enveloped by some unnatural darkness.

It was as if not even one ray of light could shine through it.

But it should've still been afternoon. No matter how much it rains, there should've been some sign of the sun's light coming through the windows-

snap

A strange sound rang out in the darkness.

"Wah!"

It wasn't just once, like a chain reaction those sounds began to continuously multiply.

snap snap snap snap snap

One by one, the lights turned on throughout the hallway, and by the time the sounds stopped the whole building was bright with light.

"…Matsuda-kun?"

That was all I could think of.

He must have responded to my voice calling out. With that expectation pushing me forward, I proceeded down the hallway enveloped in artificial light.

"Matsuda-kuuuun! Where are you!"

As I peeked into a passing classroom, "Matsuda-kuuun?" Checking a bathroom, "Matsuda-kuuun" While walking up the stairs, "Matsuda-kun?" Peeking into yet another classroom, "Matsuda-kuuun?" Checking a bathroom, "Matsuda-kuuun" While walking up the stairs, "Matsuda-kun?"

While continuing to go through those actions, I eventually ended up at the highest floor.

Even there while calling out "Hey! Matsuda-kun!" and going through the hallways, bathrooms, and classrooms, I couldn't catch sight of him anywhere.

Getting tired, I decided to catch a quick breath.

Then once again that thought came into mind.

So the Ex-School Building was something like this.

As I walked around the building looking for Matsuda-kun, the atmosphere didn't really give the impression that it was anything like a school.

First of all, there weren't any windows here. From the first floor all the way to the highest floor, the windows in all the hallways and classrooms were boarded up with thick wooden planks, appearing to be the cause of the unnatural darkness. Further more, all the hallways and classrooms had seemingly nonsense, disgusting pieces of artwork with bad taste scattered everywhere.

As a result, any trace of the building being a school was lost.

It was unthinkable that this building was in this state even from when it was being used, but if that was the case, then someone for some reason definitely had to have planned this. But who and why?

"Aah, you must be pretty surprised huh."

"Kyaaaaaaa!"

With no warning whatsoever a voice came out from behind me, and without thinking I jumped up.

In a panic, I turned around and-Huh? There wasn't anyone there.

"Well that's to be expected. Even I was surprised by all of this."

Even so, I could still hear that voice.

Once again, I looked around my surroundings and, as I thought, I couldn't detect any human figure.

"…Hey, Onee-chan, where are you looking? I'm right here, you know."

[Onee-chan is the more polite way of saying big sister. It is used occasionally by younger boys when addressing an older girl, and a general term used by people when addressing teenage to young adult women.]

The voice was coming from in front of me, coming right from the hallway.

"Yes, yes. I'm right here."

Wincing due to the exceedingly strange turn of events, I focused my conscious towards the direction where the voice was coming from. As I continued to stare, a young boy's figure began to float up.

"Um, a child?"

"Oh, I guess you forgot about me once again!"

The boy looking to be fed up, put his hands onto himself.

"…I'm Yuuto Kamishiro. Class 77's Super High School Level Spy!"

I immediately opened up the Ryouko Otonashi Notebook and was able to remember before that annoying itching bothered my head.

"Ohhh, Kamishiro-kun!"

"Geez, how many times have I introduced myself by now?"

Displeased, Kamishiro-kun puffed out his cheeks.

"…Wait, why are you in a place like this?"

"That's what I was going to say."

While letting the air out from puffing his cheeks, he spoke

"Actually, how did you even get in here? Weren't there a good amount of security guards wandering around the area? It's nothing for someone with no presence like myself, but I would think it would be impossible for an average person like you to get past all those guards."

I was at a loss for words. There's no way he would believe me if I said that the security guards just let me through, "Um…it just kinda, happened…"

As a result, that was the only explanation I could think of.

"You forgot how you got in here? Oh well, guess there's no choice."

But it seemed like he accepted it one way or the other.

"Well, there's nothing I can do if you already got here."

Kamishiro-kun then began boastfully talking about how he got into the school. From the results of various espionage activities, he caught wind of the secrets connecting the Ex-School Building and the series of incidents occurring, and then sneaked into the building itself not much earlier from when I reached it, it appears.

By the way, it appeared that it was also Kamishiro who found the breaker to the electricity and turned on all the lights.

"But it's pretty impressive that you were able to find the breaker when it was so dark."

"Ahaha, I guess the night vision scope I use in my hobbies was pretty helpful!"

Scared, I decided not to ask about what exactly those hobbies would be.

"Well when I think about it, meeting you here was some good timing. After all, if you, my client, weren't here the Resolution Phase[honestly I don't know what the original text is supposed to translate into] wouldn't be able to start."

"…Huh? Resolution Phase?"

Kamishiro-kun then took out a pastry and with a huge bite stuffed it in his cheeks, and spoke in a proud manner.

"Basically, I already got the full picture of this story down. The next step is to take care of things in a spy-like manner and prevent it from happening, and that'll be another case complete!"

"Hmm, I see…"

"Ehh?? Isn't that reaction a bit too weak?"

Kamishiro-kun proceeded to then ridiculously over-react.

But a weak reaction was to be expected, after all, things like the case or the Resolution Phase didn't matter to me at all.

More importantly, Matsuda-kun.

I need to meet Matsuda-kun!

"…It'll be alright. Yasuke Matsuda should be heading over here soon."

"…Huh?"

"You were probably worrying about Yasuke Matsuda right?"

While suppressing his laughter, he shoved the rest of the bread into his mouth and immediately started off in another direction.

"Alright, let's go. We'll talk while walking."

"…Eh? Go as in, where?"

"C'mon, if you don't hurry I'll leave you behind!"

Kamishiro-kun then rhythmically got on the stairs, while I hurriedly followed after.

"Hey, Hey wait! You know where Matsuda-kun is?"

"Ahaha, already going off about him, you sure are impatient Onee-chan! Well, I don't really dislike that part of you however. You know, it's pretty common in American movies. Those scenes where they start stripping down while roughly getting it on…that kind of impatience really turns me on!"

"Hey, stop screwing around."

"You're the one screwing around aren't you?"

Without thinking my whole body froze when Kamishiro-kun turned around and looked at me.

It was because the look on his face was unexpectedly dangerous and ruthless.

"Matsuda-kun, Matsuda-kun, man you sure are persistent. Just be quiet and listen to what I have to say for now."

Without any word of confirmation, Kamishiro-kun's words and gaze put pressure on me, and he then returned to seemingly bouncing down the stairs.

After leaping towards the end of the flight, he once again turned back towards me and-

"What's wrong Onee-chan? Hurry up!" his face already returned to that innocent smile. "C'mon, hurry up!"

"…A-Alright."

Confused, I walked down the stairs. After rejoining Kamishiro-kun at the end of the stairs, we continued side-by-side down the next flight.

"Ok, let's start with Hope's Peak Academy's Worst Incident."

It seemed that his Resolution Phase or whatever has already begun.

"I think you already got the gist of it but, Hope's Peak Academy's Worst Incident occurred somewhere in this Ex-School Building. That's right, everything, started, right, here."

Connecting everything in one go, that seemed to be the detective-style way of the Resolution Phase.

"It was certainly the worst incident, the worst incident that ever occurred in Hope's Peak Academy. After all, 13 members of the Student Council composed of the elite were murdered…but there were two people who survived that Worst Incident…one was the Super High School Level Student Council President, Soushun Murasame, who somehow escaped along with suffering major injuries, and the other person was,"

"Izuru Kamukura."

Wait, what?

Even I was surprised as I blurted those words out without thinking.

"How rare to see you remembering something…"

Kamishiro-kun's strange gaze then stuck onto me.

"…Well, whatever."

He soon moved on and began explaining once again.

"Izuru Kamukura was hiding something, the fact that he was an individual amazing enough to be called Super High School Level Hope. Kamukura was researched on by Hope's Peak Academy, they raised him, he was the result of their collective effort, every talent and ability was forced into his body that was of the Super High School Level Class. He was truly Hope's Peak Academy's Hope. That's why the school hid the existence of that secret, to the point where no student knew anything about Izuru Kamukura, whether he was a boy or a girl…he was raised completely sheltered."

Sheltered upbringing…living completely closed off from the world, I was the same as him. I was shocked that it sounded almost exactly like myself.

"But…that Kamukura guy caused a ridiculous incident to occur."

Kamishiro-kun's tone then seemed to become more serious.

"Kamukura of all things caused that bizarre mass murder to occur within the school…it really was the worst. After all, the person who was praised to be Super High School Level Hope more than anyone else caused such a despair-inducing incident to occur. If it wasn't the worst, then I don't know what it is."

That was the reason why it was called Hope's Peak Academy's Worst Incident, that certainly was something the school would label it as. The existence they raised together as a collective effort committing such an unprecedented bizarre murder crime, there wasn't anything to call it but the worst.

"But that's not all there is. What's even worse is that not only did the school not bring light to the situation, they attempted to fully conceal it."

As he spoke while rhythmically stepping down the stairs, I was completely sucked into what he was saying. Without making any sort of response, without writing anything in my Notebook, I just intently listened to what he had to say.

"The school was most likely afraid…after all, if people were to catch wind of that incident, the foundation of the school's principal "Talent is humanity's hope" would crumble. If that happened, the school would lose authority, and if handled improperly they wouldn't last much longer…that's why the school is trying to hush up the incident. Well, there was probably pressure from outside sources as well, but the ones we should feel sorry for are those Student Council guys…"

Student Council, those words snuck into my head, and along with that itchiness, it forced that memory to surface.

That memory was the Madarai brothers, their faces as they relentlessly chased after that incident.

"After all, those guys all died in vain. It really is awful. It's like as long as it's for the sake of the school's Hope, anything can become a stepping stone…even if it wasn't the Preparatory Department, that kind of thinking is to be expected…[okay I have no clue what this last part was trying to say so whatever]

I shook my head and chased those images of Madarai's faces out.

They don't have anything to do with me.

This wasn't the time to be thinking about them.

"And then, the ones who led this process of covering the evidence were none other than the top of the top, the Committee Board members themselves. They hid the fact that Izuru Kamukura was not just a survivor, but the perpetrator of the entire incident."

"And that's…where this Ex-School Building comes in?"

After not doing so for quite some time, I responded, and Kamishiro-kun quickly nodded.

"Either way, there's no reason to ignore the place where the incident occurred. Might as well check it out while we're here carefully snooping around, right?"

While descending from the 2nd floor stairs to the 1st floor stairs, Kamishiro-kun continued going on indifferently.

"But what really was a miscalculation on the school's side was…while they were moving along assuming they covered up the incident, there was still another troublesome individual that hadn't been dealt with."

"Junko Enoshima…"

The moment I spoke those words, we reached the 1st floor.

"…Over here, come with me."

Without a moment of hesitation, Kamishiro-kun continued to walk forward.

"The first person to discover the truth of that incident was Junko Enoshima. Then, by dragging out Izuru Kamukura…she aimed to overthrow Hope's Peak Academy."

While continuing to walk, both Kamishiro-kun's destination and Resolution Phase seemed to be reaching the core.

"What happened afterwards was completely aligned with her plan. The disappearance of the Committee Board old men shows that. That was definitely her doing. She probably kidnapped them and forced Izuru Kamukura's whereabouts from them with brute force but…Junko Enoshima really is someone to fear. Geez, and just how is she Super High School Level Fashion Girl?"

Hearing Kamishiro-kun's words, that itchiness brought up a flashback, my memories were reviving.

This time it was that concrete room with those iron bars. Those corpses of the old men whose eyes were hideously sewn together were there.

"…Onee-chan. What are you doing just spacing out like that? Over here, over here!"

Kamishiro-kun was already standing far away, calling out towards me, and I responded.

"Oh, sorry…"

I jogged over to where Kamishiro-kun was standing. He stopped at the very end of the first floor hallway. There was nothing in front of him but walls.

"It should probably be around here…"

"What should be here?"

"…Ah! It's this!"

Raising his voice, he pointed towards a small opening in the wall.

"I borrowed this from the security guards outside but…"

While speaking he pulled out a long rod-like object from his pocket, it looked like some kind of key. Kamishiro-kun then inserted that key into the wall. A clink could be heard coming from his small hand.

"Jackpot! I was thinking it could've been this! I investigated like crazy all over this place but there weren't any other suspicious areas!"

Sounding very proud of himself, Kamishiro-kun turned the key.

Along with the sound of rumbling, the door slid open like one of those automated doors.

Past that door led simply a straight, long and narrow passageway. An imposing double door could be seen standing at the end.

"W-What…is this place…?"

"I said it earlier didn't I? This is where Izuru Kamukura is hidden."

Kamishiro-kun sounded extremely excited.

"…Matsuda-kun is here too?"

"He could be already here or he could be on his way….either way, Yasuke Matsuda will definitely show up."

Kamishiro-kun then proceeded to step foot into the passageway, and I followed suit.

Our steps rang about in the cool, dim passageway as we walked straight forward towards the back. My lips were getting dry and I constantly felt the need to lick them.

When we finally reached the end we stopped for the time being.

Without saying anything, Kamishiro-kun put his hand on the door. Imitating his process I did the same, and I saw that he was taking a deep breath. It seemed that even he was a bit nervous. We then exerted pressure at the same time, and the doors opened with an exaggerated groan.

Past the door laid about 15 square meters of nothingness that spread out. With the ceiling and pillars all being completely bare, it was truly a dreary and tasteless room.

"…Onee-chan, over there."

Kamishiro-kun was pointing towards the corner of the room.

There stood a simple elevator one would see in a factory of some sorts.

"That must be it."

Immediately after he spoke, Kamishiro-kun energetically ran straight towards the elevator. While I stood in hesitation, he manually pulled open the doors to the elevator and shouted out.

"C'mon, hurry up! You want to meet Yasuke Matsuda right?"

Matsuda-kun

Those words pumped me up.

That's right. The only reason I came to this dangerous place was for Matsuda-kun. I'm sure everything will get resolved if I can meet Matsuda-kun. This nightmare, my brain, everything will be exceptionally resolved into a happy ending waiting for me.

That's why I have to go!

Determined, I ran straight towards the elevator and jumped on with that momentum.

The moment I got on, my legs began to tremble and, I knew I regretted it.

"…I'm sure this elevator was made with the sole purpose to hide Kamukura. Man, they really were exceptionally careful, here we go."

Sounding quite amazed, he then took out the control panel from the floor and put his hand on it. There were but only two buttons. "Floor 1" and "Floor B", Kamishiro-kun then pressed "Floor B" without any hesitation.

A ridiculously loud sound could be heard from the motor, and the floor began to heavily tremble. After I continued to tremble from uneasiness, the elevator began to steadily descend.

"…Hehe, exciting isn't it?"

Immediately, Kamishiro-kun began to raise his voice into a cheer.

"It looks like you really are enjoying this…aren't you afraid?"

"Ahaha, of course I'm afraid!"

Kamishiro-kun responded with a smile on his face.

"To be honest, I'm actually terrified, to the point where I want to run away. Man, it's the first time I've ever felt like this. I can't believe someone like me is getting scared over this…but, that's why this is so fun! After all, if I can overcome this fear, I'll develop even further as a spy! That's why I won't run away. For the sake of powering up as a spy, I won't run away!"

Then, a simple question floated into my head.

"Hey, Kamishiro-kun. Why are you-"

"Why am I so persistent about my talent? That's a silly question, Onee-chan."

He anticipated my question and responded.

"It's the same thing as asking a swimmer 'Why are you still swimming if it hurts so much?'…it's only natural to be so fixated on it. After all, that's all I have."

While talking, Kamishiro-kun raised his hands up as far as he could.

"Oh, Onee-chan, you should stretch out your body as well. To prepare for the unexpected you know? C'mon, puff out that chest!"

"…I'll pass."

"Ahaha! I thought you'd say that!"

After smiling with that innocent face, he returned to that serious look of his.

"If you take away my activities as a spy, I'd have nothing left. An extremely unnoticeable child…that's all I'd be. But I do have a talent. Because we have a talent, we can't choose how we live our lives. The moment we were given our talents, we already started living in our set scenario…ha, what a one-sided lifestyle huh?"

Because you have a talent you are assigned a predestined fate to struggle with. If that's called a one-sided lifestyle, that probably is an accurate definition.

"But, we actually desire that one-sided lifestyle ourselves. That's why we came to Hope's Peak Academy. To continue to struggle with the talents we're proud of. Along with the rest of the students of this school, you're the same aren't you Onee-chan? That's why we have to keep moving forward, no matter how scared we are. This isn't some cheap line like "Believe in yourself", this is our duty. If we ran away, that'd be like rejecting our very existence. That's why we have to continue to struggle."

Honestly, more than anyone else, my very being that continued to doubt myself, couldn't understand Kamishiro-kun's feelings at all.

After all, if I was scared, I could just run away.

It doesn't have anything to do with me.

"…Oh, but I'm not just scared, you know."

Kamishiro-kun appeared to be justifying himself.

"Well, it's true that I'm scared but…I'm just as excited however. Izuru Kamukura, Junko Enoshima, the elites of the Student Council, Yasuke Matsuda, and the Committee Board…the chance to resolve the chaos that intertwines all of them. I'm sure if I'd be able to solve everything, my name would be carved into Hope's Peak Academy's history. The legendary spy who rescued the Super High School Level Hope, Yuuto Kamishiro!"

"…Eh? Rescue?"

Without thinking I responded. Even though I've been listening all this time without a word, but that's why I was so interested in the wording.

"You mean what I meant by rescue? You know, Izuru Kamukura is the culprit of Hope's Peak Academy Worst Incident right?"

"The point is, Izuru Kamukura is a victim too, that's, what, I, mean, you know?"

Suddenly I felt like everything went silent, that's the bizarre feeling that washed over me.

"But, it's the Committee Board members who decided not to let anyone discover this "horrifying truth". That's why they hid only Izuru Kamukura down here using that reasoning…if I manage to uncover the real truth and chase down the "true culprit", wouldn't that be the level of something left behind in Hope's Peak Academy's history?"

Suddenly, his eyes began to sparkle.

"I don't really want appreciation from the school or anything but, just think about it. The image of the principle kneeling with tears streaming from his eyes, thanking me….aha, ahahahaha!"

Kamishiro-kun, while smiling, began spinning around. The sight of excitement was similar to one of a dog greeting someone.

"Actually, I already imagined the whole thing! 'Hope's Peak Academy's savior, Super High School Level Spy, Kamishiro Yuuto!' or something! Ahahahahahahaha, now that would stand out! That would stand out like crazy! It stands out to the point where it would completely blow away my lack of presence!"

At that point, I felt like I finally caught a glimpse of his true feelings.

I'm sure he believed in his talent, and at the same time he detested it.

It was distorted, but most likely he was not the only one.

Anyone who would be assigned with a talent would probably somehow fall to towards that feeling.

And then it happened right after that.

clang

Along with that sound came heavy shaking, and the sound of the motor finally stopping rang out. It seemed that the elevator has reached its destination.

"…Looks like we're here."

Finally ceasing his ridiculous dancing, he let out a quiet voice as the elevator calmly returned. And then while he walked towards the door, "Now, I wonder if the Masterminds are already here…"

"Hold on."

Without thinking, I held onto the door Kamishiro-kun was heading towards.

"…Hm? What's wrong? You want a kiss before the decisive battle begins?"

"No, it's not that…"

I had a bad feeling about this. A really bad feeling. But nonetheless, I asked him. I had to ask him.

"Hey, what do you mean by Mastermind?"

Kamishiro-kun's eyebrows twitched.

"Ahhh, that was careless of me. I was planning to reveal everything about the accomplices once I captured everybody…"

He then licked his lips with a bitter smile.

"Accomplice…"

The only person who could fit that category would be that girl. Actually, she's the only person I could think of.

"You're talking about…Mukuro Ikusaba right?"

"Huh!? She's suspicious?!"

Unexpectedly, Kamishiro-kun appeared to be surprised.

"Wow, I didn't know that! Then that means there's two accomplices, huh? Well, well, well…this is just one huge family!"

This time, it was my turn to be surprised.

"Wait, if you didn't mean Mukuro Ikusaba, then…"

"Of course, I'm talking about Yasuke Matsuda."

At that moment, I was hit with shockwave so powerful that the word "shockwave" wouldn't even describe it properly. My heart began beating as fast as it could, it's agonizing screams reverberating all throughout my body. A cold shiver ran up my back, numbing my spine and taking my breath away.

"Well, I should probably tell you this right now but…Izuru Kamukura isn't someone who necessarily should be called the culprit in the first place. He was just some poor fellow who got wrapped up in all this chaos. The real person who set this all up was Junko Enoshima. Basically, she wasn't just the first to discover this case, but the Mastermind pulling the strings from the shadows. The one who secretly worked as an assistant for her is none other than Yasuke Matsuda…but I wonder if it's weird for a man to be doing that sort of thing." [Okay, I don't know if this is a pun or if the characters used for "assistant" in this case have a feminine connotation or not but, the first two

characters used in 女房役(assistant) mean something along the lines of a wife or a female advisor, so I'm guessing that's why Kamishiro mentions Matsuda being a man.]

Kamishiro-kun's starting point for his Resolution Phase was such an unexpected topic that all I could do was stand there and listen.

"I'm pretty sure those two are the only ones aware of their relationship. Well, the school doesn't know about it at least. Otherwise they wouldn't even request help from Yasuke Matsuda in the first place…or maybe that was the very reason…anyway, as a result, Enoshima was able to successfully avoid investigation from the school."

I became a brainless mannequin that couldn't even perform the simplest of responses.

By the way, who is this Yasuke Matsuda he's been talking about? What Yasuke Matsuda would that be?

"But, cooperating with them wasn't the only thing Yasuke Matsuda did. Like I said before how the disappearance of the Committee Board members was the work of Enoshima…It appears that Matsuda was involved with that case as well. Man, they really are a great combination!"

I had no idea what he was talking about.

In fact, I rejected comprehension of his words with all my might.

By learning things I already don't want to know, my head will hurt. My chest will suffer. I'll feel like throwing up.

"Also, the conclusive evidence that ties them together…I've seen it. Well, it was because of witnessing that evidence that I was able to get this far to the truth but…"

I don't want to hear any more!

But as if stabbing me, he continued talking.

"….Junko, Enoshima, and, Yasuke, Matsuda's, love, scene."

Junko Enoshima and Yasuke Matsuda's love scene?

What is that.

Really, what is that.

What is that. Really, what is that. What is that. Really, what is that. What is that. Really, what is that. What is that. Really, what is that. Really, what is that. What is that. Really, what is that. What is that. Really, what is that. What is that. What the heck is that?????

I heard the sound of something crashing down.

It was the sound of my nerves crashing down dominos in a chain reaction. The dominos with the words "Yasuke Matsuda", "Junko Enoshima", and "Love scene" written on them all came crashing down like an avalanche.

Everything was arranged.

Everything was arranged by Junko Enoshima.

My relationship with Matsuda-kun. All my feelings towards Matsuda-kun, were arranged by her.

Matsuda-kun. Matsuda-kun. Matsuda-kun. Matsuda-kun. Matsuda-kun.

Matsuda-kun?

Betrayed. that word played in the back of my ears.

Betrayed, fooled, used, manipulated, that was the truth.

The truth of this incident.

Yasuke Matsuda. Junko Enoshima. Love Scene. They clattered as they were crashing down.

At the same time the door was clattering while Kamishiro-kun was prying it open.

"C'mon, Onee-chan. For the time being, let's get out of here. We'll talk about the rest once everyone's together…c'mon, hurry up, hurry up!"

Still in a daze, I was pushed out of the elevator by Kamishiro-kun.

As I staggered out clumsily, I found myself in a massively tall circular hall, it was like a miniature theater.

"Hey, this place is pretty nice."

Kamishiro-kun's voice coming from behind me echoed across the hall.

"Yep. This could actually be a fitting stage for my Resolution Phase to begin in."

It certainly looked like a stage developed with something in mind. There was nothing there. There wasn't anything that would give the impression of anyone living here. Interior design was kept to a minimum with wallpaper and carpets, and the only furniture were a bed and a drawer. There was a bare western-style toilet sitting in the corner as well. Either a wide extravagant prison, or a low-budget play setting. That was the impression it gave.

Although what drew my attention more was, the fact that no one was there.

Junko Enoshima, Mukuro Ikusaba, Matsuda-kun, or even Izuru Kamukura who was supposed to be hidden here, none of them could be seen.

This was a situation instead of any of the important individuals Kamishiro-kun just spoke of, only the outsiders Yuuto Kamishiro and Ryouko Otonashi were standing.

But, I wondered if that really was so.

Maybe I've been making a huge misunderstanding. All this time I've thought that I hadn't have met Izuru Kamukura even once, but I wonder if that really was the case?

Maybe he's been watching over me all this time. Maybe the person I've been looking has been watching over me all this time.

Basically, Izuru Kamukura's true identity was—

Yuuto Kamishiro?

I immediately turned around.

But, Kamishiro-kun wasn't there.

The moment I thought that, my vision perceived Kamishiro-kun's appearance.

He was crouching at my feet.

No, he was more like kneeling down on the ground.

But even so, our eyes met.

I instantly jumped back.

My shock towards such an illogical development.

My horror towards such an incoherent result.

The pressure in my skull grew to a point where it wouldn't be surprising if my nose started to bleed, and my [nerves?] began trembling to the point where they wouldn't connect properly.

Kamishiro-kun, unrelated to him kneeling down on the ground, was looking not at the floor, but at the ceiling.

That's impossible.

To turn one's head all the way towards their back, that's impossible, for, a, living, human.

Basically, that's what it was.

He was already not one of the living.

Kamishiro-kun with his head turned 180 degrees back and glaring at the ceiling was completely stiff.

The only thing that appeared to be living was the red stream of blood dabbling out of his mouth.

He would already show no response to anyone's voice, or anyone's words.

This was too much for me.

It was so much for me to the point where my conscious couldn't fully take on the scene of someone dying in front me. Due to that, all my reactions slowed down. If this was true, I would have already ran away from here. After all, the first thing to come to mind would be the fact that the person who did this to Kamishiro-kun must be very close by.

But, I was too slow.

"Poor kid."

A figure appeared next to the elevator.

It was a slim fair-skinned man, wearing a dirty shirt and pants that were of Hope's Peak Academy.

"If only he didn't meddle with Junko Enoshima's affairs…then maybe he wouldn't have met such a brutal end."

Letting out those words with his face down, not one single emotion could be felt.

"W-Who are you?"

While I inquired, trembling, he lifted his face as if he only just noticed me.

"Are you…talking to me?"

He looked exhausted.

A face of someone who lost everything.

The face of someone who lost all his thoughts, all his senses, and all his emotions.

"…You don't remember me?"

After the man responded with a cold voice, he spoke again with an even colder one.

"Why don't you remember?"

"W-Why I don't remember…well…I-I easily forget things…"

Struck by fear and confusion, I was in complete panic.

"U-Um…hold on a minute please!"

Flustered, I dropped my eyes towards Ryouko Otonashi's Notebook, and it was at that moment.

I was hit by that wave of itchiness.

That itchiness soon turned into pain. But it was a pain that brought fever. It was like warning signal. The frictional heat coming from the conflict of the remembering Ryouko Otonashi and the forgetting Ryouko Otonashi, that was the cause of the pain.

"Does Izuru Kamukura ring any bells?"

"Eh….?"

Hearing the words coming from that unexpected murmur, the pain went away all at once.

"…Is that true?"

The man right in front of me was, Izuru Kamukura.

The result of Hope's Peak Academy's collaborative effort, Hope's Peak Academy's symbol.

The man known as Super High School Level Hope.

Then, why?

He looked at me with eyes full of sadness as if he was begging me to rescue him from a bottomless swamp.

Why was he looking at me with such sad eyes?

I don't know. I don't know but, those eerie eyes caused me to avert my eyes from his without thinking, but my gaze landed on the eyes, seemingly searching for salvation, of the corpse of Kamishiro-kun, and I once again averted my eyes in a panic.

"It would have been better he didn't find out…"

Possibly following my gaze, he muttered as he looked down on Kamishiro-kun.

"If he didn't get involved, it wouldn't have ended this way…"

I felt like those words were aimed at me as well, and immediately I felt as if my life was in danger.

"But, you're different."

"Huh…?"

"Everything I've done so far…you have a need to know."

A need to know, Huh? Why me?

Before I could ask that question, he let out a big sigh.

"Besides…I also need more time to think…that's why I've decided to talk a bit more before I make my decision…"

Mumbling to himself, it was as if he was only reciting from a script. Scared of his current state, I began to try looking around the room without getting noticed. But, other than a ventilation duct, there didn't seem to be any place where I could escape to. The only exit was the elevator, in which Izuru Kamukura was standing, blocking the entrance.

"Well…I guess I should start with Junko Enoshima's goals."

Scratching his head while speaking, he didn't seem to bother meeting my eyes, rather, he seemed to be avoiding them.

"Hope's Peak Academy's Worst Incident doesn't really mean much to Junko Enoshima in the first place…"

"…Eh?"

With just those words, my attention was fully drawn.

Hope's Peak Academy's Worst Incident…doesn't mean much?

"Junko Enoshima just wanted to stir up the pent-up emotions of the Preparatory Department. She got the Super High School Level Hope involved in that incident solely for that reason, and then incited those guys…no, it wasn't something simple like inciting, it was brainwashing."

"Brainwashing…"

Pain along with violent itching brought up that scene in my mind.

The monitor's visuals I saw past the Monokuma Heads in the underground facility. Crushing heads, cut faces, agonizing screams, the Mutual Killing red lumps of flesh.

"She used me and the student council as sacrifices solely for that purpose. For the guys who were just treated as leftovers, she threw the school's proud elites into a game of Mutual Killing…it truly was the worst incident wasn't it?"

"Mutual Killing…?"

While bearing the tight tension that wrapped around my chest taking my breath away, I squeezed the question out of myself.

"M-Mutual Killing…what exactly do you mean?"

"First of all, Hope's Peak Academy's Worst Incident wasn't just simply a mass murder, it was Mutual Killing instigated by Junko Enoshima."

Instigated by Junko Enoshima.

Mutual Killing?

Huh? Killing each other?

" Enoshima used the Ex-School Building due to its state as a closed off vicinity, locked the Student Council and Super High School Hope inside, and caused them to kill each other utilizing various traps. Scattering weapons, threatening to kill everyone if a murder didn't occur, murdering in plain sight to demonstrate a lesson, and so on. She was trying to make them doubt each other, to kill each other…it was almost like she was just wanted to experiment. She really is messed up…"

Kamukura was talking as if it were someone else's affairs. Trapped between fear and confusion, all I could do was stand there and listen.

"…And then we ended up killing each other. There was no other hope of living. Enoshima had the Preparatory Department watch the school's prized Student Council and Super High School Level Hope our disgusting methods of killing and staining each other with despair. Those scenes were vividly presented."

He then paused and took a breath.

But soon his emotionless voice once again echoed across the room.

"I'm sure she planned everything to have Izuru Kamukura survive at the end. It was the worst ending for the guys at the Preparatory Department…to see their hated Super High School Level Hope kill everyone else's hope and survive, it must have been an especially "bad ending" for them…not only that, the school hiding this sin was probably also what Junko Enoshima had planned. That's why the Preparatory Department grew to not only despise Super High School Level Hope, but the entire school."

In the end, everything went completely as Junko Enoshima had planned.

Everything followed her scenario perfectly.

"B-But, for what reason…for what reason did she brainwash the Preparatory Department? That must have been to destroy Hope's Peak Academy as well…"

"…Not only that."

Kamukura then finally looked at me.

Peeking from the small opening in his long pitch-black hair, he stared at me.

"Her goal is…much more outrageous.

"O-Outrageous?"

"To her…brainwashing the Preparatory Department was merely planting the seeds. The Worst Incident for Hope's Peak Academy…that's all that is to her.

Kamukura mercilessly hurled those words towards me. I was controlled only for that purpose, and then destroyed. I was too late in realizing it…no, I was just desperately trying not to realize it. I didn't want to believe that she was so obsessed with despair, that's the truth. The despair-filled truth that I'm involved with this incident."

"H-Hey…What does you and Junko Enoshima have to do with each-"

"What do I have to do with?"

His words were suddenly filled with intense emotion for just a moment.

"What does this incident mean to you? Are you going to go with your classic 'nothing to do with me'? If it has nothing to do with you, why are you remembering it? If it really has nothing to do with you…then it'd be best to just let that memory be lost forever."

"…Eh?"

Why does Kamukura know my saying?

And how did he know about me remembering?

"I was right, wasn't I? About you remembering? That's why you can't remember me? You remembered that I wasn't a particularly important person to you…so that's why you can't remember?"

Kamukura then revealed his eyes, their glint was tainted with deadly hatred.

"…You're such a bitch."

"Huh….?"

Then, an impossible thought floated into my head.

In order to deny that impossible thought, I asked.

"…W-Who are you? You're not Izuru Kamukura?"

"Of course I'm not you imbecile."

He then spitted out those words.

"I'm Yasuke Matsuda."

"In the end, you didn't remember. You remembered other things, just not me…damn it, this is just horrible. For you to believe me so easily when I said I was Kamukura…this really is just horrible. Does my existence barely mean anything to you?"

"…Huh? Eh? W-What?"

I didn't know what to say. An intense chill assaulted my spine, and my teeth began to chatter like a drum.

"A-A-Are you really…M-Matsuda-kun…?"

"The real Izuru Kamukura has been taken from here long time ago. That means you and I are the only ones left…almost as if someone planned this all out."

That impossible string of thought that floated in my head took the form of a concrete truth. I desperately opened up Ryouko Otonashi's Notebook and flipped through the pages in a frenzy, searching for anything that would deny this impossible truth.

Then, after a while, my hands stopped.

In the Notebook were an amazing amount of portraits detailing Matsuda-kun. Looking up and confirming the individual in front of me one more time, the scattered puzzle pieces in my thoughts immediately were placed back together.

"B-But why…? How come I'm not-"

The heartbeat in my chest, the rise of emotions-

"…I know. You're not feeling anything."

Ironically, those words proved that he was Matsuda-kun.

After all, the only other person who knew my method in recognizing Matsuda-kun was, Matuda-kun himself.

"That's because you're beginning to remember things again. Because you've began to regain your memory…you've stopped thinking about me."

"…Eh?"

"In the end, that shows how my existence wasn't anything special to you. But, you forgot about that fact…that's why you were filled with such emotion towards me."

Matsuda-kun isn't important to me?

Because I forgot that, I thought he was important to me?

"W-What are you talking about…I don't get it…"

Then that intense itching entered my brain again.

I remembered. The things I would have said to Matsuda-kun when meeting him, the things I would have done when meeting him, why I wanted to even meet him so bad in the first place. I remembered the reasons for everything.

"W-What is this…why…"

Suddenly, I wasn't able to believe anything.

Not Matsuda-kun, not myself,

Not even the world.

I spontaneously began stepping back. But, those legs immediately began to stop. Behind me stood a wall blocking my way, so I just stopped and stood there.

Matsuda-kun began taking steps as if pursuing me, impatiently moving forward.

"M-Matsuda-kun? What's wrong…?"

I cried out with a voice tinged with terror.

He responded with a pale face.

Tension building to the point where it could take my breath away, filled with fear I spoke that name.

"C-Could it be…Junko Enoshima's fault?"

He stopped in his tracks and stared at me with a piercing glare.

"…Ah, that must it be it."

That sharp glare felt as if it pierced my entire body.

These are Matsuda-kun's eyes?

Are you really Matsuda-kun?

I quickly swallowed those words almost coming out of my throat. I could tell that they would only make matters worse.

"…Hey, Matsuda-kun. Let's stop this."

Being cornered by Matsuda-kun like this, pleading was all I could do.

"How about we just head back to the laboratory? We could just relax and chat while you perform treatment on me. If we do that…everything will go back to normal!"

By the end of my pleading, my voice changed into a scream.

After all, this is just wrong!

This has to be wrong!

"…It's already too late."

But, Matsuda-kun turned his head.

"I can't go back anymore. Neither you nor I…we can't go back…"

Hearing his freezing voice, my whole body quickly began to grow cold.

"W-Why are you saying that?"

"Why are YOU spouting these cruel words."

Continuing with that freezing voice, he spoke with rage and irritation.

"You still can't remember what I've done to protect Junko Enoshima? I see, then I'll make you remember."

"I-It's alright! Let's just forget about this and get away from this place!"

"Nothing will change even if we forget, no one knows that better than you do!"

"I don't know anything!"

Reaching my limit, I shrieked with all my might.

But Matsuda-kun, without paying it mind-

"…Alright, just hear me out."

But, why was he speaking with such a sad face?

I'm the sad one here.

"Hope's Peak Academy's Worst Incident…everything changed because of it. No, I finally realized it because of that incident. The fact that my life which I thought was completely normal, was actually a fake scenario set up to control me…."

Those words were not directed towards anyone, not even me, but towards himself.

"I've been fooled by Junko Enoshima all this time…completely fooled…but even so, I couldn't stay away from her…I thought I could save her. I thought I would be able to stop her…that's what I was made to believe."

His voice immediately began to stain with bitterness.

"In order to protect her, I concealed her existence itself. But regardless of that, she went ahead and even killed the Committee Board members…that's why I went as far as to hide those corpses. I dealt with the evidence for her sake."

As my ears took in his words, my mind began playing through all the scenes that had occurred up to this point. There was no time to even feel the itching.

"Not only that…I even murdered people for her sake. In order to silence Soushun Murasame, who knew the truth about the incident…it's the same with that Yuuto Kamishiro…for her sake, I couldn't let them live. That's why…I killed them…"

I was completely submerged by the torrent of truth blasting out of Matsuda-kun. But there was something I needed to know no matter what, so I struggled to keep my head above the waves as I attempted my question.

"I-Is she really that important…? Junko Enoshima…is really that…i-important to you…?"

"She is."

Matsuda-kun responded with no hesitation.

"W-Why is she…so important to you?"

As my tears of confusion and fear pushed me against the flood, I struggled forward as I frantically raised my feeble voice.

"It's because of what she said to me. What she said to me when I lost what was once important to me. 'From now on, I'll be what's important to you.' It was ridiculously impudent…but thanks to that impudence, I was prevented from being all alone. She's not family, a lover, or even a friend…but she's someone just as important to me as any of those."

Just as important as any of those, that's how Matsuda-kun felt about Junko Enoshima.

It felt like everything was over.

No, rather, everything was over from the beginning. I had no chance of winning from the start.

Someone who had no past had no chance of competing with Junko Enoshima.

Frustration, jealousy, there was none of that.

'It's over' was all I could feel.

I let out a huge breath. Contained in that breath was my resignation to the entire world.

And then it happened.

A clashing sound could be heard, and Matsuda-kun instantly turned around.

The scene past his shoulder was laid out for me.

I could see a girl standing in the elevator.

"Look's like…I was right on time…"

With showy makeup as if straight from a fashion magazine, and huge inflated fluffy blonde hair. The uniform was popped open enough for a ridiculous amount of cleavage, along with an insanely short skirt from which long, slender white legs ran down.

"Junko Enoshima!"

I shouted out with confidence.

"Junko Enoshima…?"

Matsuda-kun mumbled mixed with doubt.

Huh?

"Oh, it's not like I came here to get in your way or anything…"

Without even a word being said, she began explaining herself.

"I just came here to provide the supplementary explanation…it appears to be the right scenario for this…"

The blonde haired girl with showy makeup unmatchingly spoke in a hesitant manner, wait, isn't that kind of weird?

"Um, well this explanation…you can probably tell from my appearance but, Needs be that I am to follow Junko-chan's Scenario, only to enact this part…yeah, that's what this is."

Then I was once again attacked by that severe itching. It was so bad that I felt like I wanted to claw my hands into my brain, and then immediately after that-Along with feeling like my vision opened up, I remembered.

I remembered the face of the girl standing in front of me.

This face I've been seeing was not Junko Enoshima, but someone else.

That's right, that would be Mukuro Ikusaba's face.

But, at the same time another question floated up in my head. If the me right now was able to recognize Mukuro Ikusaba, what about the past forgetful me? Showy makeup, blonde hair, popped open uniform, insanely short skirt, if I saw that disguised girl, would I be able to connect things together and realize it's Mukuro Ikusaba?"

"Then, does this mean…the Junko Enoshima I've know all this time…"

"I'm sorry."

The girl bowed her head.

"To explain things…the Junko Enoshima you've met was really me disguised as her."

Disguised…Basically, a fake?

"But, it's not like I did that because I wanted to…it was because Junko-chan told me to…that's why even my lines were set up by Junko-chan…"

Then, what about the real Junko Enoshima?

"So, this is the most important part but, the reason why I did all of this was-"

"Because I hid Junko Enoshima, right?"

Matsuda-kun's irritated words interrupted her.

"Because I hid Junko Enoshima, the real her is gone…and taking advantage of that, you become Junko Enoshima. Doing so, you make this one believe in Junko Enoshima's existence."

"…U-Um, what are you guys talking about?"

Make me believe in Junko Enoshima's existence? But why?

I was completely lost.

"Basically, Enoshima anticipated my actions. She saw through my plan in hiding her…and is now simply spectating my actions in amusement."

Spectating?

I frantically looked around the hall. There must have been something here indicating that someone was spectating us but, there weren't any peeping holes or hidden cameras anywhere. Huh? Why?

"This is ridiculous…to think she'd be this driven by despair…I don't want to believe this but, she must have gotten near me at some point…"

Whatever he was about to say, it quickly faded away.

I was already incapable of understanding his feelings.

His frustration towards Junko Enoshima.

His resentment against Junko Enoshima.

To the point of despair, I couldn't understand anything.

But, there was one thing that was clear to me.

Once again to the point of despair, very clear to me.

"He must love her…but at the same time, hate her right?"

"That's right…"

Matsuda-kun quietly nodded.

He confirmed my thoughts.

I was right to give up.

There was nothing I could but to give up and let everything end.

This is the end of my world.

This is the end of the world of Matsuda-kun and I.

The moment I gave up, the curtains of my soul began to slowly fall- thump

Huh?

"That's why…I have to end this."

While covering his face with both hands, Matsuda-kun let out a huge sigh. He then lifted his face with eyes brimming with unwavering determination.

"It's likely that my desire to protect her was…true despair. That's why unless I end this…my despair won't end either."

That was the voice of someone who gave up on everything.

"That's why, I have no choice but to end this…"

His eyes were full of anger, sadness, love, and hatred, all boiled and concentrated together. But even then, there was a mysterious calmness expressed on his face. thump thump

Huh? But why?

"I didn't want Junko Enoshima to get involved with others…I thought I would be protecting her that way…"

Matsuda-kun began to close our distance at a slow pace.

"That's why I hid her…that's why I desperately tried to hide her…"

thump thump thump thump

As Matsuda-kun drew closer, the beats in my heart grew louder and louder.

"But it was pointless. My actions did nothing. What I did meant nothing to Enoshima…in the end, there was nothing she could do but to inflict despair on anyone involved with her. That's why this is despair…the fact that I finally understand that."

I finally understood as well.

The thumping in my chest, I just now remembered.

The moment I gave up on everything, I remembered my feelings towards Matsuda-kun.

This must be because of the Scenario Junko Enoshima set up.

In order for despair, she had me finally remember it.

"That's why I've decided…to end things once and for all."

Matsuda-kun finally stopped in front of my eyes.

The distance between us was to the point where our feet almost touched, and while I felt the continuous heartbeat in my chest, I felt dizzy with blood rushing to my head as I looked at him.

Then, as if about to embrace me, he took those hands and squeezed them around my neck.

I was done for.

There must have been no other way. After all, Junko Enoshima was an important existence for him. Seeing how no one loved Matsuda-kun more than I did, I understood that.

But, to the very end,

I wanted to die in the world of Matsuda-kun and I.

That was the hope that embraced me to the very end.

"Is this also for the sake of…Junko Enoshima…?"

With that faint hope in my chest, I timidly asked that question.

"…No, this is for my sake."

His calm response surprised even me.

I've already accepted this.

I've already completely accepted Ryouko Otonashi's end.

"You don't need to remember anything anymore…"

I could feel his warm breath on my cheeks as he spoke those gentle words.

"…This is, the end of everything."

"Yeah, I know. After all, this has nothing to do with me, right…"

He then calmly began to put force into his hands.

But it I wasn't in pain.

In fact, the warmth coming from the palms of his hands felt comfortable, I was most likely smiling.

Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump.

Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump.

My raging heartbeat. My entire body heating up. Intense ringing in my ears.

I guess I was at least a bit scared, but Matsuda-kun's face in front of me seemed to become gentle, as he released his extreme stress.

Ah, It really is Matsuda-kun.

As I burned that face into my memory, I slowly closed my eyes.

I'll be done at this rate.

Everything will be over.

It'll finally—

not be over.

"Upupupup

I finally remembered everything.

At the same time, everything crumbled apart.

The scenery I perceived to be an immutable existence, easily, and then completely crumbled apart. It was like that sand castle. No matter how elaborate or stable it appeared to be, it easily crumbled apart like that sand castle. My entire body's skin, muscle, bones, all like dry sand crumbled apart, and I faded away.

Everything crumbled away, and went back to normal.

My world ended, and her world was created.

That would be my, Ryouko Otonashi's, final moment.

Then, everything finally returned back to normal.

The strength within those hands gradually began to weaken as energy left the entire body.

Then Matsuda finally relinquished his grip on that girl.

clang

A sound rang out from the ground. It was a knife tainted by blood. It was a knife engraved with Hope's Peak Academy's emblem. Blood could be seen dripping down around it, and soon it developed into a sizeable pool of red.

Putting my hand towards my stomach, I could feel a warm sensation.

Matsuda then returned his eyes to that girl.

"…Listen, you bitch."

He spoke while suffering.

"B-Before I die, you should know that…what I told you was a lie. That wasn't any kind of treatment. I've been…preventing, you, from, remembering, anything, at all…"

I already know that

I then heard that voice.

The mouth of that girl who responded began to swerve.

It must have been a smile.

Smiling from the taste of the knife that pierced Matsuda-kun's flesh.

And that's when Matsuda confirmed it.

The fact that the person known as Ryouko Otonashi, no longer exists.

"Um, by the way…"

Mukuro Ikusaba's murmuring voice could be heard.

"I was only supposed to appear in Junko-chan's likeness in front of the real one, but I accidentally got caught by Madarai at one point…but I really didn't caught by anyone else…"

"O-Obviously…"

Matsuda coughed up blood along with his resentful voice."

"A-Anybody who knew would easily be able to tell…even if you are sisters, you two are still different people…besides, the Enoshima who appeared before me…is definitely the real one."

Hearing the words "different people", Ikusaba, as if annoyed, turned her eyes away from him and instead placed them only on that girl and spoke.

"That's why…for this case, besides me being disguised as Junko-chan, the real Junko-chan conducted her own secret plans as well…it's just that, she herself did not even realize that…meaning, Junko-chan was deceived by herself."

"I-In the end…everything went just as planned…from the very beginning straight to the end…"

Matsuda spoke to that girl as well. While speaking, his consciousness was beginning to fade away, and just standing appeared to be a struggle. But even so, his frail gaze continued to focus on that girl.

"B-But there's one thing I don't understand…why you planned such a troublesome turn of events. Why you went so far to have me take away your memory…in order to escape investigation from the school…it doesn't sound pleasant at all…but even so, you were able to push through all of it. T-Then why…"

Failing to keep his ground, he finally sat down. But Matsuda continued his interrogation, resolute on obtaining his answer.

"W-Was it to…p-pull me, who was always thinking of you, into despair?"

That girl then began to finally move.

She gently caressed his face with her hand in an almost lovingly way, and sat down next to him, paying no matter to the blood spread around the area.

She then drew Matsuda's face, whose eyes were beginning to drift away, towards her own, and whispered.

I'll tell you.

That whisper was filled with a gentle feeling love, but it soon radically changed.

"Are you fucking kidding me? Don't get so ahead of yourself! There's no way in hell I'd go through this pain in the ass mess just to bring you into despair! What the hell are you thinking!?"

As soon as those words finished, that girl immediately thrusted her hand away from Matsuda's face.

Doing so, Matsuda collapsed onto the pool of blood he created.

"Y-You don't give a damn…is what you're saying, huh…"

Matsuda muttered those words as he laid on his back gazing towards the ceiling.

Staring at that face from straight above was that girl. Their faces were close enough for the tips of their noses to easily touch. But even so, his gaze didn't exactly match up with hers, as it began to absent-mindedly falter.

"I guess…I don't have anything to with this…t-that really was the case after all…"

Because of the overflowing blood, I felt an unnatural warmth developing in the back of my throat. But, that soon faded away.

"H-How long have you felt that way…has it been since…we were children?"

"Upupupupu."

That girl's face then warped into a cruel smile.

"What if I told you…that the reason your mom got that way was because of me? What kind of face would you show me?"

"…Wha-?"

Pain as if a sharp needle passed through his heart was displayed.

"You're, you're not serious…are you?"

As he spoke with that shivering voice, bits of blood splattered onto that girl's face from his mouth. It stood out more than even her cruel, inhumane smile.

"A-answer me…"

While Matsuda grew more and more grave, Enoshima on the other hand seemed to fall into ecstasy. Without giving any response, that girl just continued to watch as she cupped her chin in her hands.

Matsuda's soul was falling into the depths of despair.

His own meaning of life was thoroughly and decisively violated, and was then rejected.

He had completely given in to despair.

"P-Please…respond…"

His clinging words barely formed into words at all.

"C'mon…what's your answer…Junko Enoshima…"

That was the end.

Without ever hearing his answer, Yasuke Matsuda died.

Completely submerged in despair, he died.

Once she confirmed everything had ended, Junko Enoshima slowly got up.

But, she ceased her actions and decided to look down for a while longer.

She stared at the Yasuke Matsuda who had experienced his last breath not too long ago.

"There's no way this would have nothing to do with me…"

There was a hint of sadness laid somewhere in that murmuring voice.

"After all…you were the most important person to me of all…"

Those were her true feelings.

Yasuke Matsuda was an especially important existence for Junko Enoshima. Ever since they were children, he always stood up for her, always continued to unconditionally love her, and above all, just being by his side made her heart feel warm.

But, she killed off that existence with her own hands. She stepped on it, forced it past the gates of despair, and brutally murdered it.

"This…this is…"

But, that's what Enoshima had desired.

She loved him so much, that irreplaceable existence, more important than anyone else, almost obsessed with him to the point of insanity, always wanting to be within his embrace, even living in a world with only him would be fine. And by losing that incredible existence, just how much despair would I fall in?

She nurtured her love for Matsuda all this time just to get a taste of that feeling. Seeing her loved one be smothered by despair during his last moments, she pretty much lived to experience that spectacle.

Finally getting to taste that despair,

"…INCREDIBLE!!"

It was more than anything she could have hoped for.

"Too depressing! Too good! My chest is gonna tear open! This is true self-loathing! I want to die! This is! This is the despair that comes from losing a loved one!"

While Enoshima's being was assaulted by that despair, she kicked Yasuke Matsuda's corpse with all her strength.

"Amazing, amazing! Amazingamazingamazingamazingamazing!"

While absorbed in screaming, she kicked the corpse of the one she so dearly longed for with no mercy whatsoever.

Flowing out of her eyes were a continuous stream of tears.

While those tears of delight, lament, and confusion overwhelmingly flowed, kicked her beloved's corpse until it was a lump of meat barely holding any resemblance to its original form.

“Սրս…սրսրսրս…սրսրսրս. Սրսրսրս.”

When Kyouko Kirigiri opened her eyes, she found herself at the infirmary.

The scene outside the window portrayed nightfall. It seemed that at some point the day had reached evening.

As Kyouko slowly rose out of her bed,

"Look's like you're awake."

A man's voice could be coming from the window. It belonged to Hope's Peak Academy's Principal, Jin Kirigiri.

"You were completely knocked out. Has work finally caught up to you?"

"How…long have I been asleep?"

"You wouldn't stay put so I had the school physician give you some medicine. It should still be in effect so things may still be a bit hazy. You should probably just relax for now…"

Her consciousness and sensations were certainly still a bit dim. Following orders from him was frustrating but, there isn't much one can do against the effects of medicine. With no other choice, Kyouko laid back down on the bed.

And then she remembered.

She remembered the moment when Mukuro Ikusaba came to assist her.

Being cornered by the Madarai brothers, she appeared at just the right time and saved her.

But, why did she save her? Sure, there were classmates but, there were hardly any occasions of social interaction between them.

Putting that outside however, there was a more pressing issue at hand.

The girl that was with her when attacked by the Madarai brothers, Junko Enoshima, what happened to her?

She tackled that question in her mind in a very Kirigiri-like manner.

Then,

"…It appears that she was rescued by Ikusaba-kun as well. I'll save you the trouble of overthinking things…she's being temporarily hospitalized at one of the medical facilities in the teaching staff faculty building. Although the silver lining is well…how would I say this…due to the shock from that incident, it seems that she's recovered her memory."

"Memory…?"

"She'll soon return to her regular school schedule. But, it seems that she doesn't remember anything from when she lost her memory. Because that, there have been numerous confusing issues going on…and everyone has been taking care of her."

"I see…"

A classmate returning to class should have been a joyous occasion, but something didn't feel right.

Like something was being overdone.

"Also…there's something important I have to discuss with you."

His following words then completely brushed off Kyouko's doubt.

"…I'll be closing the investigation request on Izuru Kamukura."

"Eh…?"

Kyouko immediately rose up from the sudden report.

"…Why all of a sudden?"

Her question was one of urgency.

"Sorry but, I can't really talk about that."

"W-What are you-"

"Ok fine, I wasn't satisfied with the contents of your work…how does that work for you?"

Recognizing his lack of acknowledgement, Kyouko scrunched her eyebrows in inquisitiveness.

"…Then, what happened to Kamukura?"

"Speaking of which, just today the new Committee Board members got inaugurated to replace the old ones."

"Don't avoid the subject."

"Due to the members changing, decisions involving confidential information have increased. No matter what you have to say, I don't really have much freedom to be carelessly discussing our secrets."

That statement was a clear refusal. Hearing those words, all Kyouko could do was respond with a murmur of resentment.

"Why are you telling me this now…"

"Alright, in return, how about I reveal to you this confidential information we've been talking about? That is, if your pride as a detective would allow it."

His words were almost like a challenge. He was being like that for quite a while. The words "You were just being used this whole time." were likely. That kind of thought process was simple, but there was a feeling that the reason behind it couldn't be so simple. But, what caused that feeling?

Was it the intuition of a detective?

Or was it because he was her father.

She immediately shaked her head.

Shaking off that last train of thought, she roughly responded.

"…I understand. I don't mind giving up on the request. However, there is one thing I would like to know."

Kirigiri was watching from outside the mirror in silence.

"…What happened to Yasuke Matsuda? And the Madarai brothers?"

A moment of silence passed, and Kirigiri let out a hefty sigh. He then turned his eyes and began walking towards the door of the infirmary. Kyouko followed his movements carefully with her eyes. He then stopped in front of the door, and without turning his back he spoke.

"Expulsion…that's how it seems they were dealt with…"

His words felt heavy, and a hint of anger could be heard among them as well.

"Not only that, it was the new Committee Board members' intention as well. To strictly conceal the incident under the darkness. Those involved, Matsuda-kun and Madarai-kun were expelled, and soon others will follow as well."

"…You aren't going to stop them?"

"All I did was recieve the report. They're not even in the school building anymore. Even you probably would have difficulty in tracking them down."

Letting out another huge sigh, Kirigiri began to grind his teeth.

"Although, it sure was a convenient development…convenient to the point where one would think someone was manipulating the events from the shadows…"

But, he quickly turned his head, as if he regretted what he just said.

"…Even without any formal request, I'll still be looking into it."

Aimed towards the back of Kirigiri, were words full of determination.

Hearing those words, he responded without turning back.

"Detectives can't do anything until an incident ends…they're useless until all the victims show up…that's a trait that exists within even the most expert detectives. But I think you're different. I feel qualities coming from you that exceed ones of a detective. Those are words coming from witnessing your various talents up to this point. I think I'll be keeping them in mind."

"…What are you trying to say?"

Kyouko let out a stiff voice.

"There's no need for apprehending…"

Kirigiri then looked past his shoulder, towards Kyouko who was tight-lipped with anger, and an expression close to tears.

"One last thing. You're free to investigate on your own, however, if you happen to endanger yourself or attempt to bypass the school rules…I won't plan to show any mercy. Prepare yourself. If you can't keep that in mind, you'll be leaving this school."

Without waiting for any response from Kyouko, Kirigiri left the infirmary.

When entering the hallway, he let out yet another huge sigh.

Even though he was trying to keep her away from the incident for her own good, it still pained him. But she wasn't the type to just happily listen to orders. There wasn't anything to be done about that.

The situation was already out of Kirigiri's hands.

Just like the ex-Committee Board members who disappeared, the new ones would eventually become figures of valuable position in their various fields.

Soon after their inauguration, the termination of the Kamukura Project was announced.

It was their way of saying that the existence known as "Super High School Level Hope" never existed. It wasn't a very surprising turnabout. Kirigiri became the core, and the symbol of hope that Hope's Peak Academy raised and nurtured all these years, was abandoned unceremoniously.

Following these actions, the new Committee Board members' decisions and plans were quick and prompt. Through various methods, they were able to construct concealment for the incident. It appeared they were instructed by some other party.

All of a sudden, Kirigiri began to pick up pace as he continued down the hallway.

While walking at a brisk pace, he inadvertently glanced towards the window.

The idea that everything had ended was not present.

Rather, it felt like it was the start of a new turn of events.

Most likely, not a good turn of events.

A horrible incident was going to occur from this school, and then consume the world.

No one would be able to stop that.

From that prediction, Kirigiri felt an uncharacteristic chill creep on.

But, Kirigiri's decision was already set in place.

For the sake of the students, it might be time to speed up that plan. An area where even the new Committee Board members would not catch wind of, there was no other choice than the Ex-School Building.

With that thought in mind, Kirigiri began to fall into a dash. But he didn't realize it. He didn't realize what was happening to himself.

His mouth was began to faintly bend.

He must have been able to sense it. The talent holding the ability to throw the world into chaos was lurking somewhere in Hope's Peak Academy.

That was possibly why he was trembling from being enveloped by interest in this existence.

But, even so,

He had no way of knowing what laid ahead.

Eventually, that talent will inflict despair across the world, and that very despair will trample across even himself.

But Jin Kirigiri was still completely unaware.

Back from her long period of absence, the first thing taken care of when returning to her dorm room was applying the makeup.

Looking at her reflection in the mirror, Junko Enoshima saw despair.

Geez, Matsuda-kun sure had horrible taste.

Reflecting in the mirror was a simply plain, normal, and uninteresting female high school student.

"…To think something like this was of value for despair."

I don't know if he picked something up from his mother or something-Going over the sense of a loved one in despair while applying makeup, she next began to tidy up the room, beginning with picking off the numerous post-it notes saying "This is my room".

And then the Ryouko Otonashi Notebook…

Looking at this notebook brought back memories of Yasuke Matsuda. Remembering him, she could feel her chest tightening. Consumed by disgust at what she did to him, she was compelled to cry and scream out.

I want to forget this already! I want to just get rid of this notebook!

"Aha! All the more reason to keep this on hand!"

With an indescribable expression somewhere between woe and excitement, she flipped through the pages.

Suddenly, her hand stopped.

On that page laid a ridiculous amount of likeness portraits of Yasuke Matsuda.

"These horrible drawings are surprisingly heartrending…how exciting."

As expected, it seemed that her heart's wound wouldn't heal any time soon. But that's how it should be. After all, she went so out of her way and lost her memory to taste this despair.

Speaking of which, that wasn't the only reason she had her memory lost.

There was another goal in mind as well.

That reason was within the notebook within Enoshima's hands. Reports on Matsuda's methods in manipulating her memory were recorded in that very notebook.

That was her other reason.

Memory manipulation was required for the final stage of her plan to inflict further despair. That's why she wanted to test it. That's why wanted to test it on herself. She arranged for Matsuda to take away her memory, resulting in becoming a subject to that memory manipulation.

"I guess this is all one can expect from just an experiment…just becoming forgetful is only half-way progress, I guess Matsuda-kun just didn't try hard enough. Well, once I take care of it, I'm sure it'll turn out perfectly. Taking over a loved one's lovely research…I'll be sure to make use of it in the most despair-inducing way possible."

Her other reason for using Matsuda was for this experiment.

For that experiment, she anticipated Matsuda's actions and then proceeded to move freely within her own convenience.

That goes for others as well. She anticipated the results of everything, and manipulated those events at will.

By doing this, she finished her perfect development.

It was the same for even Enoshima herself.

She was able to control even her own actions, and experienced the greatest taste of despair.

"Yoo Hoo! I'm baaaaaack!"

Suddenly a strange voice rang out as the door to the room flew open.

Standing at the door was a blonde haired girl.

The one who disguised as Junko Enoshima, Mukuro Ikusaba.

With expression displayed on her face, her cheeks rose and formed a huge smile.

"Ahaha, were you surprised? I was hoping to surprise you a bit in commemoration for your return-"

"Do you think I'm retarded?"

But, Enoshima freezingly shot back.

"Are you trying to raise the tension or something? What are you going to do if someone sees you dressed like that? Are you going to take responsibility for that? Heck, are you even capable of doing that?"

"I-I'm…sorry…"

As if completely withered, her shoulders crumpled.

"Also, you barely even look like me! Are you even trying? In fact, do I even look that retarded? Do I?"

"Um, but I followed Junko-chan's written instructions completely…"

"I see, you can't do anything unless told, you really are retarded."

"I-I'm…really sorry!"

As she hurried to get changed, her eyes were completely blurred with tears.

"Man, and you still have that ridiculously skinny body! If you have time to perform in the military, you should try getting a body that men would actually like!"

"I-I'm sorry…please don't be mad anymore…"

While watching her sister's shoulders shake like a puppy being scolded, Enoshima once again stuck out her tongue(?).

Geez, I really got to rethink how I'm going to use this one.

Besides Enoshima having her sister disguise herself as Enoshima to fool her amnesiac self, there was of course one other goal.

It was another experiment. Mukuro Ikusaba's disguise was a key component in her future plan to inflict further despair.

Memory manipulation was also an experiment.

Mukuro Ikusaba's disguise was also an experiment.

No, there was more.

Forcing high school students into mutual killing and showing that visual to others to spread despair. That was, once again, also an experiment.

Everything was an experiment put into practice, killing two birds with one stone.

That's what Hope's Peak Academy's Worst Incident meant to Junko Enoshima.

Furthermore, the murder of the Committee Board members were part of that as well.

Besides forcing the location of Kamukura out of them, Enoshima wanted them to be replaced.

"Hmm, although the experiment this time around overall felt like it was missing some excitement…was it too psychotic? I wonder if I can make it even more excitingly psychotic…I guess forcing mutual killing right away is too stiff, maybe I should make it a game of some sort…yeah! That way, the murders might get a lot more dramatic!"

Of course, a mascot is necessary as well.

For this experiment, those brainwashed were dressed in sort of a cartoon character outfit but, that was no good.

That was just tasteless. There's room for tons of improvement.

"Um, well…so…"

Abruptly, Ikusaba's voice spoke out.

"Huh? What do you want?"

Enoshima clicked her tongue as she listened to what she had to say.

"Um…why didn't you hand over Izuru Kamukura over to the Preparatory Department?"

Hearing that, Enoshima clicked her tongue even louder.

"Man, you really are retarded…if they got to kill Kamukura, then they'd be satisfied just like that. That's no good. I want their uneasiness, complaints, and dissatisfaction to build up, and them explode all at once. Then they'd show their worth by becoming a mob, right? That's what they're there for."

"Oh, I see…"

A bitter smile revealed itself on Ikusaba's face as she nodded in understanding.

"Then, does that mean Kamukura is no longer needed…?"

"I don't really have anything in mind right now but…well, nothings going to happen if we just leave him be anyway. Besides, he's not anything like Super High School Level Hope anymore, he's someone who has fallen into the depths of despair!"

That was again, another result that followed her prediction.

In the end, everything moved along with Enoshima's will.

Everything fell perfectly in line with what Enoshima's ambition was.

Well, this experiment allowed me to taste despair, so I could say it was a success.

But, a little part in her still had hoped for something else.

She had hoped that the plan she worked so hard to concoct would fall into pieces despairingly.

This time it wasn't like that, but maybe someday I'll be able to taste that flavor of despair. She even sowed some seeds for the purpose of that possibly occurring.

"Ahahaha! I really am amazing, aren't I!"

Without thinking she erupted into laughter.

"I even prepared a flag for when I myself would lose…I'm the very definition of a mastermind! Don't you think so, sister?"

"Yes..but your way of talking…"

"I got tired of this personality! How many fucking years have you been my sister?"

Shifting to a violent personality and shouting at her sister Ikusaba, she soon gave up on that as well and then began staring towards the window.

"…What's wrong?"

Despite Ikusaba's worried voice, she continued to stared at the window.

Out there was a parade.

Like a surging tidal wave, the parade was flowing through the school dorms.

I wonder what those in class are thinking looking at this right now.

I wonder if they're experiencing the death of their hope?

Enoshima quickly stood up and spoke with an energized voice.

"Alright, now that the tension is off the charts, let's go head to class! Our beloved classmates are waiting for us!"

"O-Ok…"

Just like that, Enoshima momentarily returned to her school life.

It was annoying getting friendly with others, but soon the spice of unbelievable despair will scatter about. Actually, I'm getting pretty excited.

"Alright! Let's enjoy the rest of our school life to its fullest!"

After all, that was her true motive.

Thus, the keywords were set.

The flag was raised.

Mutual Killing, Ex-School Building, Brainwashed Preparatory Department, Super High School Level Hope, Class 78, Hope's Peak Academy's Committee Board, Principle, Memory Manipulation, Mukuro Ikusaba's disguise, Monokuma.

It all begins from here.

The plan to create the strongest despair all starts from here.

The, World's, Most, Despair, Inducing, Incident, starts, from, here.

Predicting what will occur is simple. But not doing so would be more interesting. A stronger taste of despair will come on that way. But can I hold on for that long? Aah, what should I do?!

Just picturing that despair caused Enoshima's heart to jump.

Because Super High School Level Junko Enoshima,

Wishes for despair above anything else.

Finds hope within despair more than anyone else.

Finds hope?

"…What the hell? Me finding hope?"

Realizing that she had been embracing hope,

She fell into despair.